

SOUTH DOWNS  
NATIONAL PARK

# Together Now for Nature, Climate and People

Partnership Management Plan 2026-31



# OUR VISION FOR 2060

The South Downs National Park is a vibrant place with nature everywhere, for everyone, where wildlife flourishes, clean water flows and stars fill the dark night skies.

Together we care for a climate-resilient landscape with thriving communities and a dynamic green rural economy at its heart.

Shaped by stories old and new, this place inspires everyone to connect, enjoy, belong and take action.





# FOREWORD

“ I believe that the most important single thing, beyond discipline and creativity is daring to dare. ”

Dr. Maya Angelou

**The South Downs National Park is an incredible place – one of beauty, inspiration and cultural heritage, a haven for nature and a place of people and for people.**

It is part of a wider network of 61 extraordinary protected landscapes across the UK. Together we are at the forefront of responding to the nature and climate crises, and to ensuring that everyone across the UK feels welcome in and has access to nature, and all the health and wellbeing benefits that it brings.

As the challenges and opportunities facing this landscape are changing, so too must our responses. We must build on what is working, acknowledge what isn't, innovate, try new things, create new partnerships, challenge ourselves, and embrace the role the National Park has to play in a greener, sustainable future. Transformation begins with a dream so together we must dare to dream of a different future.

This Partnership Management Plan is more than a report, it captures our seven collective ambitions for nature recovery, clean water, climate action, young people, cultural heritage, better access and darker skies, and to ensure

that the South Downs is a welcoming place for all with thriving communities. It sets a clear long-term vision for what the National Park can and must be. It is ambitious. The South Downs National Park needs and deserves nothing less.

In a time when the issues feel so great and people feel a lack of agency over the decisions being made around them, it is a powerful call to action for everyone, not just the few. This means you too!

The South Downs National Park was designated for us all and it will take us all to achieve the ambitious aims in this plan – farmers, communities, visitors, businesses, ecologists, rangers, planners, volunteers, children and young people, and people across all communities. The National Park Authority will work to bring people together, providing support and leadership where possible, as we reimagine the possible.

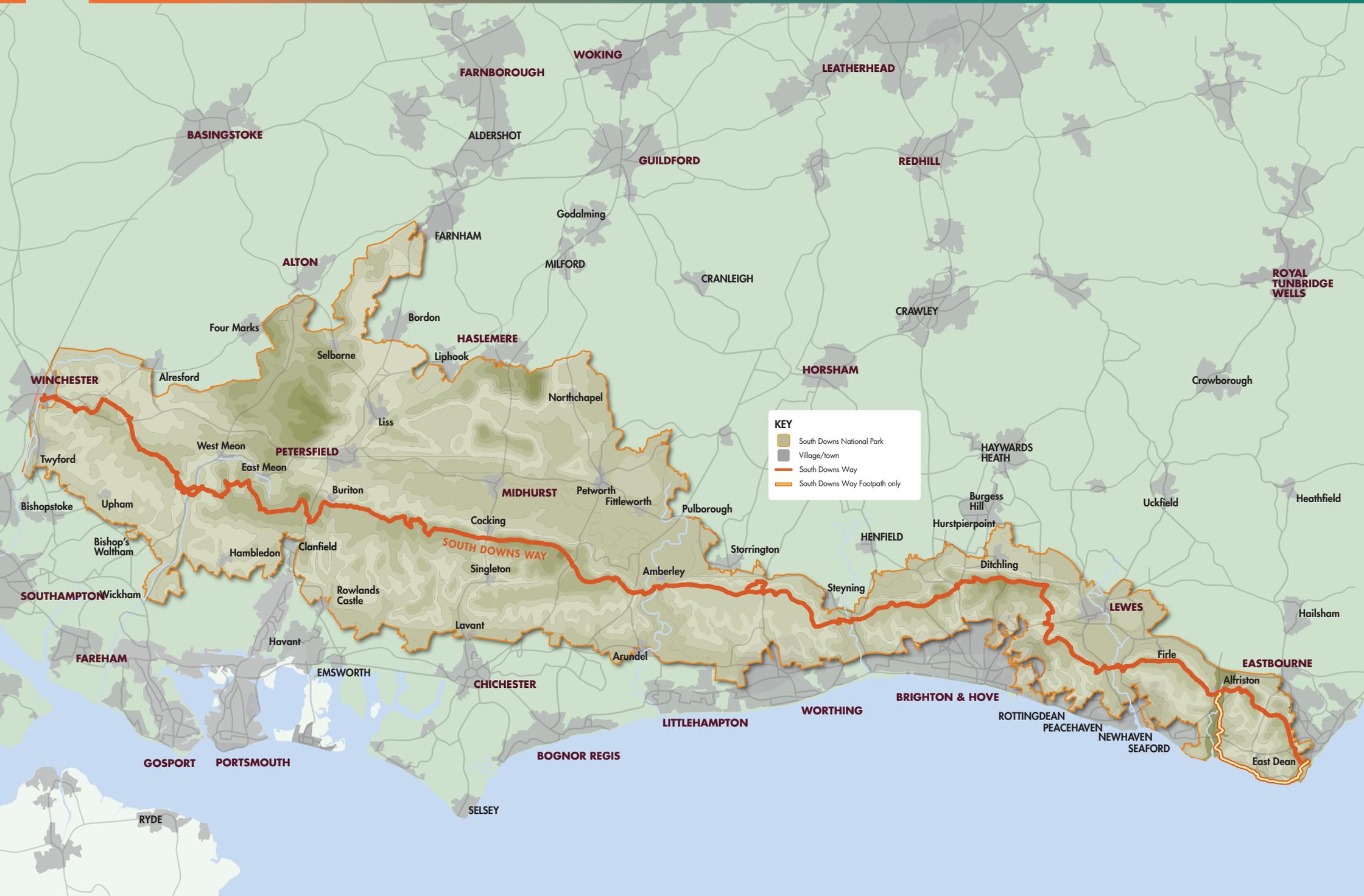
**This is your National Park. Please join us and be a part of delivering this bright future.**



**Siôn McGeever**  
Chief Executive

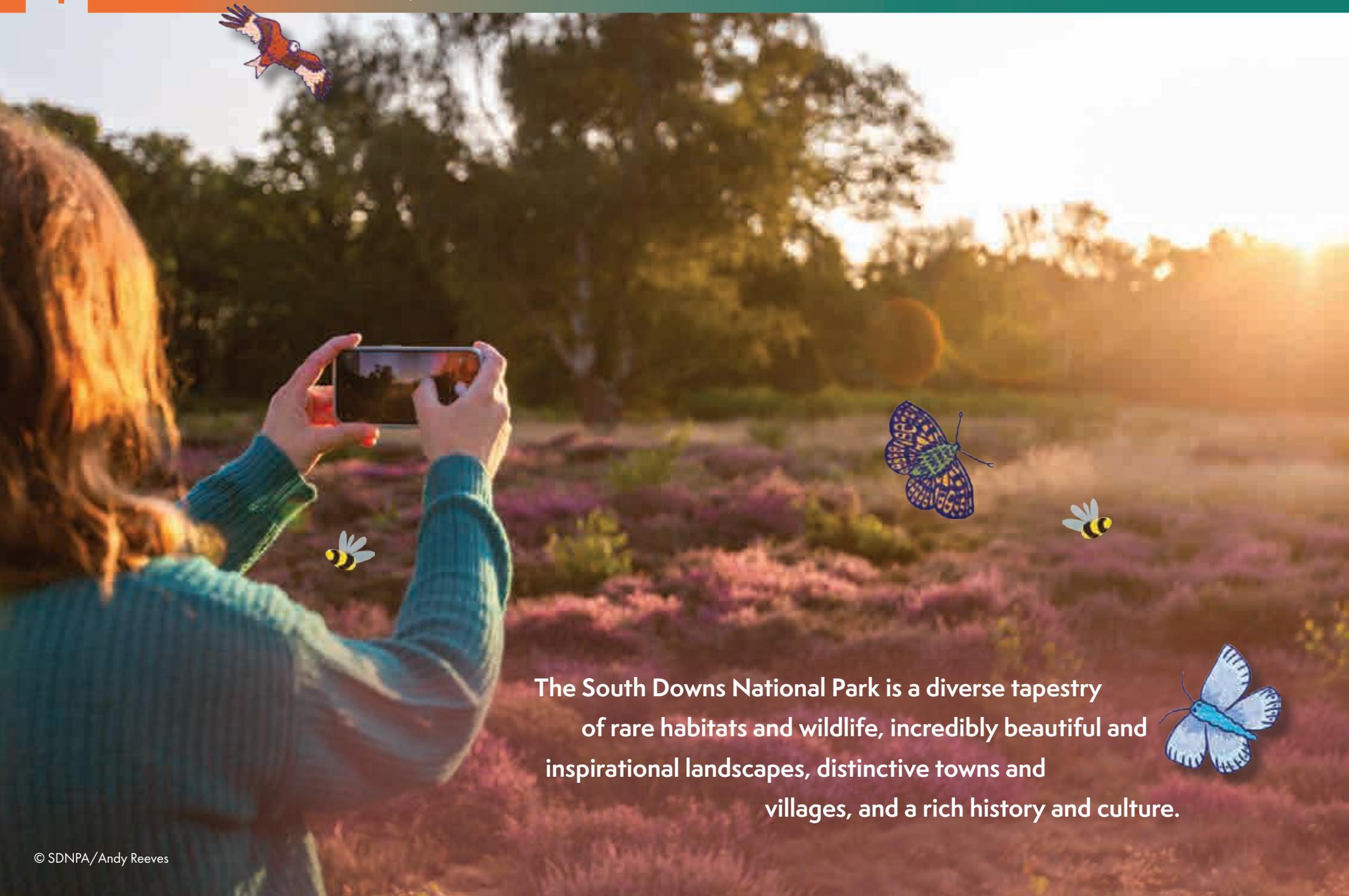


**Vanessa Rowlands**  
Chair



# CONTENTS

<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b> .....	5	<b>OUR VISION AND PRIORITIES</b> .....	17
<b>INTRODUCTION</b> .....	6	OUR PRIORITIES FOR THE NEXT FIVE YEARS.....	17
ABOUT THE SOUTH DOWNS.....	6	<b>NATURE &amp; CLIMATE</b> .....	20
OUR SPECIAL QUALITIES.....	8	AIM 1: NATURE RECOVERY .....	22
SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK PURPOSES AND DUTY .....	9	AIM 2: CLIMATE ACTION .....	28
LOOKING TO THE FUTURE.....	9	AIM 3: CLEAN WATER .....	34
<b>PURPOSE OF THIS PARTNERSHIP PLAN</b> .....	11	<b>PEOPLE &amp; PLACE</b> .....	40
WHAT DO WE MEAN BY PARTNERSHIP – WHO IS “WE”?.....	11	AIM 4: YOUNG PEOPLE .....	42
HOW HAS IT BEEN DEVELOPED? .....	11	AIM 5: WELCOME & ACCESS.....	48
HOW WILL IT BE DELIVERED?.....	11	AIM 6: CULTURAL HERITAGE .....	56
HOW WILL WE MEASURE SUCCESS? .....	12	AIM 7: A THRIVING, GREENER PLACE .....	62
HOW DOES IT LINK TO THE SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK LOCAL PLAN?.....	12	<b>HOW WE WILL DELIVER</b> .....	69
<b>CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES</b> .....	14	PRINCIPLES FOR DELIVERY .....	69
		<b>CONCLUSION</b> .....	72



The South Downs National Park is a diverse tapestry of rare habitats and wildlife, incredibly beautiful and inspirational landscapes, distinctive towns and villages, and a rich history and culture.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The South Downs National Park is a diverse tapestry of rare habitats and wildlife, incredibly beautiful and inspirational landscapes, distinctive towns and villages, and a rich history and culture. It has been shaped by people for many thousands of years and continues to be shaped by its farmers, landowners, communities, businesses, volunteers and visitors.

The world is facing challenges of nature loss, climate change and economic uncertainty. The impacts of these global crises are already being seen across the South Downs.

This Plan is the most important document for the National Park. While it is facilitated by the National Park Authority, its delivery will require collaboration and close

working with many different partners of all sizes. Together we must decide how we want to continue to shape this ever-changing landscape. How we will collectively manage change positively, welcoming new opportunities while protecting that which cannot be replaced.

This Partnership Management Plan sets out 7 collective priorities for the next five years (2026–31), with targets for each that we will report back on every year. This Plan is ambitious – the National Park needs, and deserves, nothing less.



**Figure 1: The aims of the South Downs Partnership Management Plan 2026–31**

# INTRODUCTION

## About the South Downs

The South Downs National Park has it all – rolling hills, species-rich chalk grassland, glorious heathland, internationally-important chalk streams, river valleys, ancient woodland, dark skies, thriving villages and market towns, as well as the iconic white cliffs of the Heritage Coast. The UK’s youngest and most densely populated National Park, it covers over 1,600 square kilometres of England’s most valued lowland landscapes in the busiest part of the UK and has the largest rights of way network of any National Park at 3,300km.

This landscape has been beloved and shaped by generations of people over many thousands of years – from the earliest settlers to the Romans, Saxons and Normans, through to the farmers, foresters, businesses and communities of more recent times.

“Our blunt, bow headed, whale backed downs”<sup>1</sup> have provided inspiration for writers, artists and creative minds from Virginia Woolf to Jane Austen to Tennyson, and continue to do so today. The great fictional Sherlock Holmes

himself “retired” to the South Downs countryside to tend bees where he had “given myself up entirely to that soothing life of Nature for which I had so often yearned”.<sup>2</sup>

The South Downs National Park is home to some incredibly beautiful and rare habitats and wildlife – a rich mosaic of nature. Our chalk grassland has up to 40 species in 1 square metre and our lowland heath is rarer than rainforest and home to 12 of our 13 native reptiles and amphibians. The National Park has the most woodland by area of any National Park in England and Wales, 45 per cent of which is ancient woodland. It is a landscape that has been and continues to be shaped by farming. Its watery landscapes include rare chalk streams, internationally important wetlands, river valleys, dew ponds, a stunning coastline and an underground aquifer that supplies water to millions of people and our wildlife. Our International Dark Sky Reserve provides the closest dark night skies to over 17 million people.

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1 Rudyard Kipling, Sussex.

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2 Sherlock Holmes Writing, *The Lion’s Mane*.

Figure 2: South Downs National Park in a Nutshell



## Our Special Qualities

More than 1,500 people helped us to define what is special about the South Downs National Park. These special qualities and how people connect and interact with them are what give the National Park its unique sense of place.

The South Downs National Park is a place to experience and connect with beauty, nature, culture and heritage. It is an outdoor classroom and a place of inspiration, community, work, rest, wellbeing and of welcome.

**Figure 3: Special qualities of the South Downs National Park**



## South Downs National Park Purposes and Duty

National Parks have two purposes set out in law.<sup>3</sup> National Park Authorities also have a social and economic duty to be considered when delivering the two purposes.

**The Sandford Principle:** When there is conflict between these two purposes that cannot be reconciled, greater weight should be given to the first purpose.

### Looking to the future

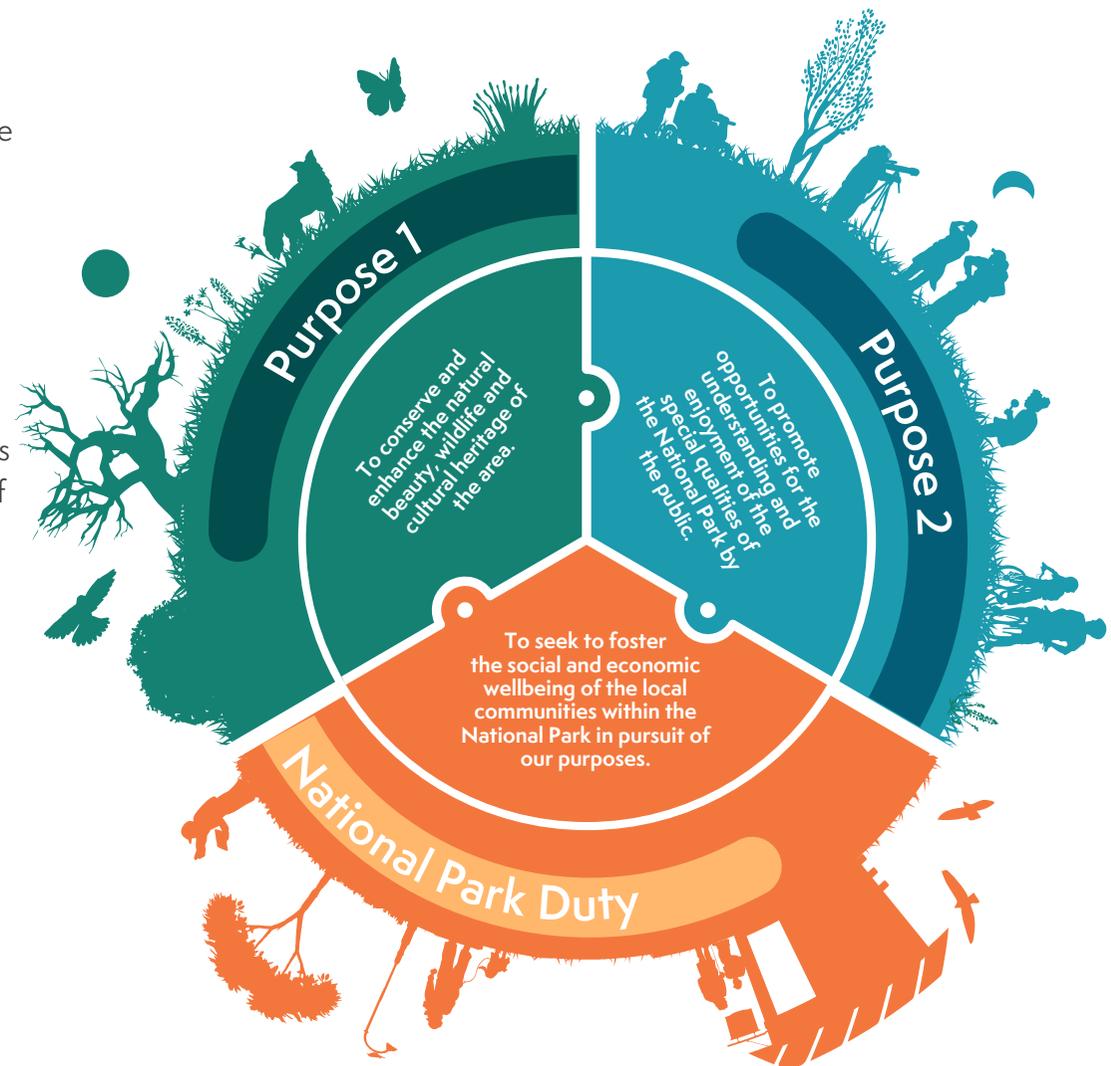
Over the last 15 years partners across the National Park have delivered some incredible successes from bringing back water voles to the River Meon, planting over 50,000 trees, to supporting 40,000 young people to access learning outdoors in the National Park. Many of these successes have been delivered in partnership with the farmers and land managers of the National Park, both individually and working together as part of farm clusters. Working with the other National Park families we have signed up to Race to Zero to take climate action. We have also launched the thought-provoking “We Hear You Now trail” with stories from writers of diverse heritage.

Yet, we know there is so much more to do. The nature and climate crises continue to threaten the National Park and there are still far too many people and communities who do not feel welcome in, or able to access, this National Park. Their National Park. Simply put, we want nature everywhere, for everyone.

The amazing South Downs National Park and the part it plays in our nationwide nature recovery, wellbeing and climate action needs us to

work together to be more ambitious, continue to build fantastic partnerships and to deliver more, not less. If not here, in one of our most treasured landscapes, then where?

**Figure 4: National Park Purposes and Duty**



<sup>3</sup> National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949, Section 5.



# PURPOSE OF THIS PARTNERSHIP PLAN

**Each National Park Authority is required to develop and monitor a Partnership Management Plan for the landscape it oversees. It is the most important document for the National Park.**

The Plan is for the National Park as a whole and sets out what partners across the National Park will deliver together over the five-year period, including the work of the National Park Authority. At its heart, this Plan is about collective ambition. This Plan sets out seven ambitious, shared aims for the next five years. Under each aim there are specific objectives (15 in total) and clear targets.

**The Plan is for everyone who has an interest in or cares about the National Park. Everyone has an active role to play, and it will take us all to achieve.**

## What do we mean by partnership – who is “we”?

National Parks are our most precious and protected landscapes. In the same way that it takes “a village to raise a child”, the task of managing the South Downs National Park is not for the National Park Authority alone. Securing the new 2060 vision (see page 17) for the South Downs will need all those who live, work in, visit and have statutory obligation to the National Park to do their part. Some of those partners will play major roles, like the farmers, foresters and other custodians of the land. Others, such as visitors or dog

walkers, will play a smaller but no less important role by visiting with care and respect. Working together we can achieve ambitious and great things for this landscape that we all love and enjoy the benefits of. In this Plan when we refer to “we”, it means this collective of National Park custodians. When referring to the work of the National Park Authority we will use “the Authority”.

## How has it been developed?

The Plan is based on engagement with a wide range of stakeholders and a review of evidence from the *State of the Park Report*<sup>4</sup>. We have focused particularly on those voices not heard enough.

The effect of the Plan on social, environmental and economic objectives has been tested through a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), and the effects on internationally designated sites have been considered through a Habitats Regulation Assessment.

## How will it be delivered?

This Plan is ambitious. To deliver it will require collaboration and close working with many different partners of all sizes. Its delivery will be guided by a set of delivery principles and a live delivery plan that will grow and develop over the time of the Plan as new opportunities arise. It can and will only be delivered through partnership – with the many custodians needed to care for this unique and precious place.

4 [State of the Park Report 2024 – South Downs National Park Authority.](#)

## How will we measure success?

The ambition of the Plan is focused on 7 Aims, with 15 clear objectives sitting under them. Each objective has targets to track our collective progress and measure whether it has been achieved. The National Park will report back on these targets on an annual basis through our website.

### What is the PLTOF!

Throughout the targets in this Plan you will see references to PLTOF. The Government has developed the **Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework (PLTOF)**, which establishes ambitious targets for National Parks and National Landscapes. It recognises the crucial role protected landscapes play in achieving positive changes for nature, climate, people and place. The PLTOF is made up of ten targets for protected landscapes and partners to prioritise and focus on delivery.

## How does it link to the South Downs National Park Local Plan?

This Plan sets the vision for the National Park and our shared ambitions for the next five years. The Local Plan is a spatial, land-use plan for the National Park, setting out where development should happen, for housing, economic activity and nature, and what it should look like. Its policies support the delivery of this Plan. The Partnership Management Plan is a material consideration in planning decisions, and the Local Plan is a means of delivering aspects of it.





# CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

**The South Downs National Park is a living, changing landscape that is being impacted by many key issues, from local to international, some completely outside of our control.**

We are committed to understanding these issues and the impact they are having or may have on the National Park, so that we can respond, adapt and take action to secure a positive future.

We also stand ready to work with partners to identify and act on opportunities to ensure a positive future for the National Park. As part of our work in preparing this plan for the next five years, we have spoken to farmers, land managers, communities, businesses, parishes, other partners and visitors to understand not only what we should prioritise, but the challenges and opportunities we must face together to deliver on those priorities. More details can be found in our updated *State of the Park Report (2024)*.<sup>5</sup>

## Climate Change

Climate change is already impacting many aspects of the National Park, from its habitats and species diversity through to essential natural resources such as water and soils, its businesses and communities. There is a growing swell of community-based climate action across the National Park, and this is vital to achieving net zero by 2040. Climate change is also transforming land use and

landscape character. Biodiversity net gain (BNG)<sup>6</sup> and carbon offsetting will increase tree cover and this means the landscape will look different. Working together as a National Park family, we have ambitious targets to reach net zero by 2040. We are also working closely with our farmers, foresters, land managers and businesses to make sure that our ReNature credits and carbon offsetting enable farmers and land managers to run profitable thriving rural enterprises, while also delivering for climate, nature and people.

## Nature Recovery

Nature remains under huge pressure. The Government has set ambitious targets for nature recovery, and National Parks and other protected landscapes want to and need to lead the way. The development of Local Nature Recovery Strategies provides real opportunities to bring partners together to deliver nature recovery at a landscape scale. Cultural heritage is also emerging as an important sector in the fight for nature recovery and working with new partners and grant bodies will be crucial if we are to deliver nature everywhere, for everyone in the South Downs.<sup>7</sup>

Farmers in the National Park have worked to deliver environmental improvements for decades. Funding is provided through agri-environments schemes, like Countryside Stewardship, Landscape Recovery and Sustainable Farm Incentive, and grant funding, from the National Lottery Heritage Fund to local grant giving trusts. Private finance also offers great potential to speed up

<sup>5</sup> SDNPA – [State of the Park Report 2024](#).

<sup>6</sup> Biodiversity Net Gain is an approach to development. It makes sure that habitats for wildlife are left in a measurably better state than they were before the development.

<sup>7</sup> [Heritage 2033 – our 10-year strategy | The National Lottery Heritage Fund](#).

and increase nature recovery, but it needs to be managed carefully to ensure that the right nature recovery happens in the right place, and that rigorous monitoring is in place. Farmers and other land managers are vital to nature recovery. In a landscape that is nearly 70 per cent farmed, we simply cannot do it without them.

## Economy and Funding

A thriving rural economy underpins the ability to be able to deliver for nature, climate and people. Many of the objectives in this shared Plan for the National Park rely on delivery by the farmers, land managers, businesses and communities in and around the National Park. The rural economy and communities of the National Park are impacted by the growing economic uncertainty and by cuts to funding at a national and regional scale. This is affecting the resourcing of the National Park Authority and our partners large and small. The National Park Authority is investing in income generation and will work closely with partners to secure the funding needed to deliver on this Plan.

## Farming and Land Management

Farming is continuing to experience its biggest changes in decades, with changes to farming practices and pressures on farmers and land managers to deliver more – more food production, more for nature and more for climate. The Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) programme targeted much-needed funding at farmers in National Parks and other protected landscapes to support that delivery. We welcomed the announcement in January 2026 that the FiPL programme had been extended for another three years. Certainty about the future of FiPL and wider agri-environment schemes is vital to supporting farmers and other land managers to continue to deliver for nature, climate and people while feeding the nation.

## Growth and Development Pressures

The South Downs is the most populated National Park in the UK, situated in the busiest part of the UK. The National Park is experiencing major housing development around its borders and neighbouring areas are increasingly struggling to meet housing demand. The communities and businesses of the National Park also need affordable and accessible housing if they are to continue to thrive and to ensure that those who work in the National Park can afford to live here. Continued housing demand is also placing increasing pressures on the water available, and this has implications for people, nature and agriculture.

## Public Transport

Public transport – or a lack of public transport is a challenge for all of the National Parks across the UK. While the South Downs is served by quite a number of train stations, many areas are without regular bus routes or without any train stations or bus routes at all. There can also be a challenge to achieve that “last mile” into the National Park through public transport. Providing public transport is the responsibility of partner local authorities, many of whose budgets are under increasing pressure. The Authority is committed to continuing to work with our partners to find ways to improve and expand the public transport network into and around the National Park. Where routes exist, we are working to promote their wider use. There is, however, no quick and easy solution or a means to create significant change in the near future. The Authority is hopeful that devolution will provide opportunities for public transport issues to be addressed in future Partnership Management Plans.

## The Next Generation of Custodians

Young people are central to the future of the National Park. They need opportunities to connect with this special landscape for their own health and wellbeing and to begin their journey as its future custodians. There is a growing gap in the number of green skills needed nationally, and this is

reflected in the National Park, with implications for maintaining and adapting its built heritage, and delivering nature recovery and climate action on the ground. This Plan sets out to work with partners to create those opportunities for young people to connect with and help conserve this place for future generations.

## Policy Changes

Significant policy changes have happened or are happening that will have a huge impact on the National Park. The Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 shifted the requirement for “Responsible Bodies” to further the purposes of National Parks. This strengthened legislation should form the basis for strong partnerships and joint working, enabling greater commitment and resources to the delivery of this Plan. Supporting delivery of this Plan is a key way in which relevant bodies can demonstrate their commitment to furthering the purposes of the National Park, as set out in the legislation.

The Government has also introduced a new Protected Landscapes and Targets and Outcomes Framework<sup>8</sup> which sets ambitious targets for National Parks and other protected landscapes.

Significant changes will occur to local structures and partnerships during the life of this Plan, with both devolution and local government reorganisation set to have a significant impact on the operation of the National Park and the delivery of this Plan. The National Park falls under two devolution partnerships – Sussex and Brighton, and Hampshire and the Solent. Close partnership working with the new authorities will be needed to ensure delivery of this Plan and to secure the positive future of the National Park and for the National Park to fully benefit the new authorities. The National Park currently has 15 local authorities represented on the Authority. There will be impacts on governance, partnership working and delivery.

## Mental Health and Wellbeing

While the pandemic may seem like a distant memory, its impacts are still being felt on our health and wellbeing. The health and wellbeing benefits of connecting with nature are well documented, yet many parts of our communities do not have the opportunity or means to access the National Park. This is particularly true for those who perhaps need it most; young people, people with health issues and disabilities, mental health issues, those with lower incomes, and those from ethnic minority backgrounds. We are committed to working with these communities to learn how to support better opportunities for access and connection.

## More People

With more people enjoying the National Park come both pressures and opportunities. More people caring about the National Park and wanting to take action to care for it means more lives changed through the power of nature connection, more citizen scientists helping to gather the data that will aid in nature recovery, more volunteers taking practical action to help nature and to create a more accessible National Park, and more people behaving in a way that conserves the South Downs for others – now and in the future. However, a small minority of users of the National Park, both residents and visitors can create significant issues through their behaviour, even if, at times, unintentionally. One issue that came through again and again in the consultation was negative dog behaviour impacting wildlife, livestock and people’s enjoyment. We are committed to continuing our Take the Lead campaign promoting positive dog ownership and to working with our residents and visitors to create our South Downs champions of the future.

# OUR VISION AND PRIORITIES

## Our Vision For 2060:

**The South Downs National Park is a vibrant place with nature everywhere, for everyone, where wildlife flourishes, clean water flows and stars fill the dark night skies.**

**Together we care for a climate-resilient landscape with thriving communities and a dynamic green rural economy at its heart.**

**Shaped by stories old and new, this place inspires everyone to connect, enjoy, belong and take action.**

## Our Priorities for the Next Five Years

We have spoken with partners, farmers, residents, communities, parishes, local authorities and other public bodies, visitors, businesses and specialists to help identify a clear set of shared and challenging priorities for the next five years to help us to work together to make this vision a reality. Two key, interconnected themes have emerged – Nature & Climate and People & Place. Below these themes sit 7 aims and 15 objectives. We have set clear targets against each objective:



# NATURE & CLIMATE

## AIM 1 NATURE RECOVERY

The South Downs National Park is a nature-rich, resilient working landscape where wildlife flourishes.

- **Objective 1.1:** To improve, expand, connect and increase the resilience of wildlife-rich habitats and land managed for nature to ensure we are on track to reach 60% managed for nature by 2060.
- **Objective 1.2:** To support land-based businesses to thrive as economically viable, nature-friendly, climate-positive food and drink producers.
- **Objective 1.3:** Improve and manage existing nature-rich sites – protected sites and priority habitats.

## AIM 2 CLIMATE ACTION

The South Downs National Park is on track to become net zero by 2040 by mitigating and adapting to the impacts of climate change.

- **Objective 2.1:** To support businesses and local communities to take positive climate action to ensure they are adapted and resilient to climate change.
- **Objective 2.2:** To support land managers, farmers, foresters and landowners in their aspirations to deliver nature recovery and climate action on their land.

## AIM 3 CLEAN WATER

Clean, abundant water supports nature and communities in the South Downs National Park and beyond.

- **Objective 3.1:** To support catchment-based partnership approaches to water management so that nature and communities can thrive, and flood risk is reduced.
- **Objective 3.2:** To improve the condition of the water environment to ensure enough clean water for nature and people, and water habitats are restored.



# PEOPLE & PLACE

## AIM 4 YOUNG PEOPLE

Young people will have opportunities to access training and skills to enable them to take action to care for and enhance the South Downs National Park.

- **Objective 4.1:** To provide opportunities for young people to take positive action for nature, climate and heritage.
- **Objective 4.2:** To support young people on the pathway to green careers.

## AIM 5 WELCOME & ACCESS

A valued South Downs National Park is welcoming and accessible to all.

- **Objective 5.1:** To improve the accessibility of the National Park to enable everyone to actively travel and connect with nature.
- **Objective 5.2:** To increase the darkness of the National Park's International Dark Sky Reserve to support nature recovery and improve understanding of and access to dark skies for all.

## AIM 6 ARTS & HERITAGE

Cultural heritage in the South Downs National Park is conserved, understood, valued, created and passed on for future generations.

- **Objective 6.1:** Increase conservation, awareness, access and understanding of cultural heritage in the National Park.
- **Objective 6.2:** Promote connection to the landscape and its special qualities through archaeology, traditional crafts, contemporary arts and diverse storytelling.

## AIM 7 A THRIVING, GREENER PLACE

A thriving rural economy and local communities sit at the heart of the South Downs National Park.

- **Objective 7.1:** To support the growth of a greener economy across the National Park while providing outstanding visitor experiences that benefit our communities and landscape.
- **Objective 7.2:** To support the needs of local communities through affordable, accessible and low-carbon housing.



# NATURE & CLIMATE



We are in the midst of a dual global crisis of climate change and biodiversity loss. These crises are not just happening somewhere else. They are not worries for the future. They are happening here. They are happening now. They are impacting the landscape, nature, communities, businesses and our health and wellbeing.

There is hope. We can turn the tide. Working together in the South Downs National Park we can restore our habitats and species, store vast amounts of carbon and lead the way in how we live, work and visit in a more sustainable way to push back on biodiversity loss and climate change.

**We must act together now. Three key aims have been identified to focus that collective action for the next five years:**



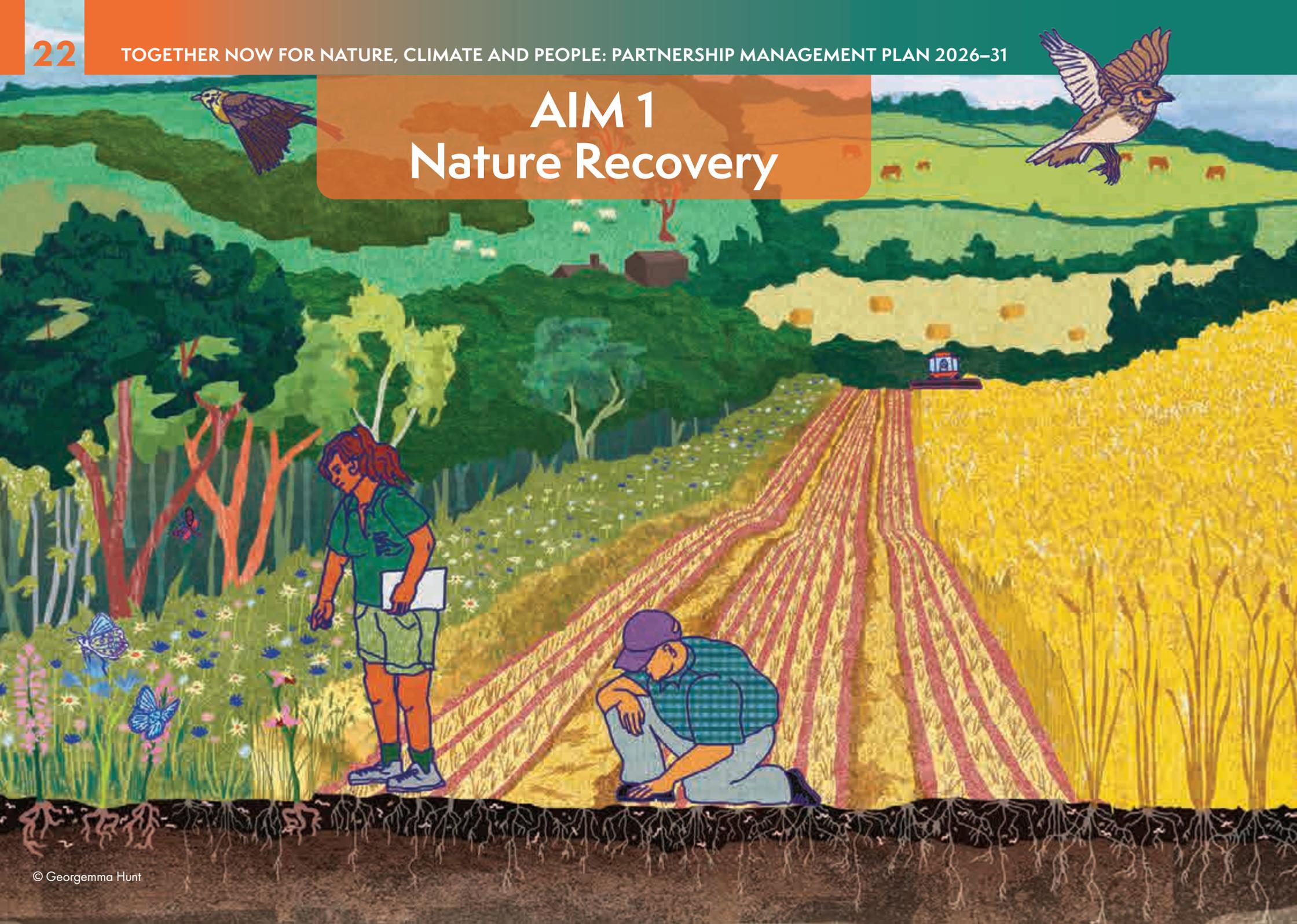
The truth is: the natural world is changing. And we are totally dependent on that world. It provides our food, water and air. It is the most precious thing we have and we need to defend it.



SIR DAVID ATTENBOROUGH



# AIM 1 Nature Recovery



“We are part of nature, not separate from it”  
Dasgupta Review<sup>9</sup>

**The South Downs National Park is a nature-rich, resilient working landscape where wildlife flourishes.**

Nature is beautiful, inspiring and uplifting. It also underpins our lives – our communities, our economy, and our health and wellbeing. It provides the air we breathe, the food we eat, the water we drink and the space in which we find health and wellbeing. Because these “natural assets” are free, it is too easy to take them for granted, not realising that we need nature as much as nature needs us.

We need a landscape rich in flourishing, expanded and connected habitats that is teeming with native wildlife. We can no longer rely on the edges and margins to provide this space. We need to find space for nature alongside the production of high-quality local food and drink, timber, and access to nature within thriving rural communities. All of this needs to be underpinned by a greener economy. This means our landscapes may look different in the future.

<sup>9</sup> Final Report – The Economics of Biodiversity: The Dasgupta Review – GOV.UK.

### Key Facts:

- Around 70% of the South Downs National Park is farmed.
- 30% of land is made up of protected sites (6%) and priority habitats (c24%).\*

\*The UK as a whole has 3% protected sites and 14% protected habitats. Protected sites and habitats can also be farmland.

The South Downs National Park and other protected landscapes provide the best places to create flourishing and resilient nature, forming the basis of a nature recovery network across the UK. If not here, then where?

Fantastic work for nature is happening across the UK in response to the call for a “bigger, better, more joined-up approach”.<sup>10</sup> Yet this has not managed to turn the tide and reverse those losses.<sup>11</sup> In 2021 we launched our ReNature initiative with an ambitious target of creating 13,000 hectares of new habitat managed for nature and improving the condition of thousands of hectares of existing habitat. We are just over half-way there, with 6,766 hectares created, managed or secured for nature so far. We must now go further in our collective ambitions to “ReNature” the National Park. We need to be faster, smarter, bigger, better and more joined up if we are to reverse the decline in nature.

Innovation, experimentation, creative thinking and, most importantly, collaboration and energy, are required.

<sup>10</sup> Lawton Review.

<sup>11</sup> Defra, Species Abundance Indicators 2025; State of Nature Partnership 2023.



© SDNPA/Daniel Greenwood

- The UK government has set ambitious national targets for restoring nature.<sup>12</sup> These targets will be delivered by Local Nature Recovery Strategies for each county. The South Downs National Park is covered by two Local Nature Recovery Strategies – one for Sussex (East and West combined) and one for Hampshire. These will set out how and where nature can be both created and restored. The National Park Authority, farmers, businesses and other partners are playing a crucial role in their development as they provide a blueprint for delivering nature recovery both inside and around the National Park:
  - **Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Hampshire.**
  - **Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Sussex.**
- Supporting farming and farm businesses is central to nature recovery. Farmers and land managers face a time of significant change: agri-environment schemes are being redesigned, world markets are uncertain and climate change impacts are being felt. Collaborative and innovative partnership working is already underway through farm clusters and other farming groups, and we must support and work with these key custodians for nature.
- Alongside agri-environment schemes, private finance and grant funding are providing new and innovative vehicles to fund nature recovery while supporting viable farming businesses.

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12 **Environmental Improvement Plan** 2023.

## OBJECTIVE 1.1: To improve, expand, connect and increase the resilience of wildlife-rich habitats and land managed for nature to ensure we are on track to reach 60% managed for nature by 2060.

The South Downs National Park is a rich mosaic of different habitats – a vibrant nature network. This holds the key to its diversity of species, enabling species to move within the landscape and respond to climate change.

To create faster, smarter, bigger, better and more joined up nature recovery we need to look at opportunities for nature everywhere; creating new nature-rich places and improving and connecting existing habitats.

Getting the right habitat in the right place – for nature, farmers and people – is key. Most habitats will need regular management over time. So, new habitats need to be carefully placed and to work for those who will manage them.

We are committed to supporting delivery of the UK's international commitment to 30x30<sup>13</sup> as agreed at the UN Biodiversity Summit (COP15) in 2022 and enshrined in the 2023 Environmental Improvement Plan.<sup>14</sup>



### TARGETS FOR OBJECTIVE 1.1:

#### Target 1.1a: Protect and manage 30% of the National Park for nature by 2030 (30by30):

- PLTOF\* Target 1: Restore or create more than 3,300ha hectares (2% of the National Park) of a range of wildlife-rich habitats within the South Downs National Park, outside protected sites by 2031.
- PLTOF\* Target 2: Bring 80% of SSSIs features within the National Park into favourable condition by 2042. 50% by 2031, the end of the PMP.

Target 1.1b: By 2031, long-term monitoring data for South Downs priority species shows an increasing trend.

\* The Government has developed the Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework (PLTOF) with ten targets for protected landscapes.



13 30by30 on land in England: confirmed criteria and next steps – GOV.UK.

14 Environmental Improvement Plan 2023.

## OBJECTIVE 1.2: To support land-based businesses to thrive as economically viable, nature-friendly food and drink producers.

Farmers are central to both food production and nature recovery. Most of the habitats in the National Park, including chalk grassland and lowland heath, rely on regular management by skilled farmers or land managers.

Farming and other land-based businesses in the National Park have a long history of diversification and innovation, combining new techniques, approaches and ideas with a deep understanding and experience of these landscapes and habitats.

They are also businesses that need to be financially viable. Farming is experiencing its biggest period of change in decades, with changing farming practices, and with new agri-environment schemes being developed alongside opportunities to fully integrate nature and climate delivery into productive, sustainable farming. This supports the need to move beyond the edges and margins if we are to truly turn the tide for nature.

Local food needs to be able to be sold locally with all the necessary infrastructure and supply chains required: from local abattoirs to food processing, distribution and shops selling goods directly to customers.

Delivering nature-rich habitats is underpinned by the regenerative farming techniques that farmers are already exploring to improve soil and water while increasing food production.



© Mischa Haller

### What do we mean by regenerative agriculture?

**Regenerative agriculture is approaches to farming and food production that enhance soil health, rebuild water and nutrient cycles, improve biodiversity, reconnect landscapes and revitalise communities.**

Using new initiatives including nature-based solutions and offsetting through private finance, we can support the development of a nature-rich, climate-positive and financially viable farming sector.

### TARGETS FOR OBJECTIVE 1.2:

- **Target 1.2a:** Increase rural business diversification that improves economic viability while enhancing nature recovery, landscape character preservation, and or aligning with regenerative tourism principles.

### OBJECTIVE 1.3: Improve and manage existing nature-rich sites – protected sites and priority habitats.

Our nature-rich sites are home to some of our rarest species. It is not enough for these sites to be identified and designated. They need ongoing and carefully balanced maintenance to remain nature-rich and in good condition. To properly care for these precious sites, the farmers and landowners who manage them need coordinated advice, support and resources on a site-by-site basis. It is also vital that we have a clear picture of their condition and the challenges that need to be addressed. While there is still work to be done to gather a full picture, we have identified a number of key issues, some of which are having a Park-wide impact:

- **Management of chalk grassland and heathland:** Heathlands and chalk grassland are some of the rarest and most biodiverse habitats on Earth. Chalk grassland, for example, can have 40 species of plants in just a square metre. They rely on careful management including grazing by the right type of animal at the right time of year. Small, fragmented chalk grassland sites and heathland sites on common land present different challenges to graze in a way that keeps the stock safe and healthy and that is financially viable for land managers. Grazing is vital to maintaining chalk grassland. Dogs not being kept under control can not only lead to deadly dog attacks on livestock and wildlife, it can also mean that farmers are unable to graze important areas of chalk grassland – threatening the very existence of this nature-rich habitat that is such an integral part of the South Downs.
- **Woodland management:** The South Downs has more woodland than any other National Park in England or Wales. Healthy woodlands are

far more than trees. They have a rich understory that key species such as invertebrates, bats, butterflies and birds rely on. Small woodlands are important habitats and stepping stones for species but they are particularly difficult to manage because of cost pressures due to their small size. A healthy woodland requires active management and can be productively “cropped” like other land. A lack of expertise in woodland management can particularly affect smaller woods, impacting species diversity. A wider problem is the expanding population of deer, which browse on young tree saplings and woodland understory, preventing new trees from growing, and taking away vital habitats for key species, eventually leading to the death of woodland. Deer numbers are a real and increasing threat to achieving nature recovery in the National Park, and their numbers must be managed effectively if we are to achieve our shared objectives.

#### TARGETS FOR OBJECTIVE 1.3:

- **Target 1.3a:** ( PLTOF Target 3)\* For 60% of SSSIs within the National Park assessed as having ‘actions on track’ to achieve favourable condition by 31 January 2028.
- **Target 1.3b:** (PLTOF Target 4)\* Continuing favourable management of all existing priority habitat already in favourable condition outside of SSSIs (from a 2022 baseline) and increasing to include all newly restored or created habitat through agri-environment schemes by 2042.

\*The Government has developed the Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework (PLTOF) with ten targets for protected landscapes.

## AIM 2 Climate Action



## The South Downs National Park is on track to become net zero by 2040 by mitigating and adapting to the impacts of climate change.

Climate change is already having a fundamental effect on the National Park – on the landscape, habitats, species diversity, forestry, agriculture, food production, water resources, the rural economy and our local communities. These effects are expected to intensify over time and could include more extreme weather events, increased risk of wildfire and drought, more flooding, declining soil fertility and other threats to food security, and damage to infrastructure and archaeological features. They will also mean the loss of nature – critical and beloved habitats and species will disappear.

We need to effectively plan for these outcomes through mitigation and adaptation, and through building resilience in our landscape, biodiversity and communities.

### Key Terms

- **Net zero:** Net Zero means all sources of greenhouse gases are reduced as close to zero as possible and activities are encouraged which remove emissions from the atmosphere, to ensure there is no increase to the total amount of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere.<sup>15</sup>
- **Mitigation:** Actions aimed at reducing carbon and other greenhouse gas emissions to prevent or lessen the severity of climate change impacts.

- **Adaptation:** Taking actions to prepare or adjust for current and projected impacts of climate change to reduce vulnerability and increase resilience to extreme weather and other climate-related risks.
- **Resilience:** The ability to absorb, resist or recover from disturbances or damage from natural influences, human activities (including climate change) while continuing to provide ecosystem services.<sup>16</sup>
- **Nature-based solutions:** Working with nature to protect and enhance it in a way that helps tackle climate change while benefitting biodiversity and our wellbeing.

Working in partnership is our greatest strength as a National Park. We will take climate action by bringing together all those needed to build climate resilience in our nature, our communities, our heritage and our rural economy. Together we will continue to find innovative, nature-based solutions, and new opportunities and ways to shift to a low-carbon future. We will do this by working proactively with our communities, our farmers and land managers, and other businesses.

We are not working alone. Together with the 14 other National Parks across the UK we became the first National Parks in the world to join the United Nations backed “Race to Zero”,<sup>17</sup> committing to drive action to halve carbon emissions within our landscapes by 2030 and to become significant net carbon sinks by 2050.

The climate crisis can only be effectively tackled if we all work together with international, national, local and personal actions.

15 [CCC Insights Briefing 3 – The UK’s Net Zero target](#), Climate Change Commission.

16 Ecosystem services include clean water and air, healthy soil, food production, access to culture, energy, carbon storage and much more.

17 [Race to Zero – global campaign to achieve net zero emissions launched | Blog post | PRI](#).

**OBJECTIVE 2:1** To support businesses and local communities to take positive climate action to ensure they are adapted and resilient to climate change.

### Our communities:

The South Downs is the most populated National Park, with 113,300 residents and around 2 million people living within 10km of its boundary. The South Downs is also home to the biggest towns in any National Park. Lewes, Midhurst, Petworth and Petersfield are all wonderfully distinct towns that provide important hubs for the wider rural area. This represents a huge resource in terms of people, time and energy to deliver climate change action at a local level. Many community groups and parishes are already doing excellent work to make their local communities more resilient and sustainable in the longer term.<sup>18</sup> We want to ‘add value’ to this local level action by involving communities within and adjoining the National Park.

Together we want to support communities that are ready and willing to make a fast transition to ‘net zero’. We can use these communities as exemplars for others to learn from and follow. We will support and promote best practice locally to encourage others to make a positive contribution to climate change action.



We will focus our collective activity across the National Park on:

- Coming together, sharing knowledge and finding solutions together:
  - The Authority has created the South Downs Climate Action Knowledge Hub<sup>19</sup> to enable community groups, parish councils and local activists across and around the National Park. Communities need to join up and share challenges and successes of their climate action.
  - Supporting communities to consider the future risks associated with climate change and consider what can be done to adapt or develop resilience.
  - Encouraging wider volunteering capacity within parishes and local groups to enhance community resilience to potential climate change impacts.

<sup>18</sup> The groundbreaking Ouse Valley Climate Action partnership is empowering local people to help create one of the first communities in England to fully embrace climate action.

<sup>19</sup> [Join the Knowledge Hub – South Downs National Park Authority.](#)

- Working with local public health authorities to help them develop health impact assessments for climate change, and support local communities to understand and plan for these impacts.
- Ensuring emergency planning considers the needs of rural communities within the National Park – flood protection, power outages, wildfires, landslips, storm damage etc.
- **Community Energy:**
  - Encouraging and supporting the development of community-based energy planning.
  - Supporting energy projects that build resilience and flexibility at local grid level so that communities are less impacted by grid outages.

### Our businesses:

One-third of all businesses in English National Parks are in the South Downs. These businesses add £533 million of economic value to the National Park. Together, businesses and visitors account for 50 per cent of carbon emissions in the National Park.

To reach net zero we must work together with businesses to create a greener and more sustainable economy while maintaining a thriving rural economy. Aim 7 is all about how we collectively support that thriving rural economy and community that underpins and makes our other aims possible:

- Growing and signing up to Our South Downs, the sustainably minded business network for the National Park.
- Increasing the sign up of businesses to verified sustainability certifications such as B Corp, Sustainable Wines GB and the National Park's Green South Downs Sustainability Certification.<sup>20</sup>
- Supporting farming businesses to diversify and become more sustainable.

### TARGETS FOR OBJECTIVE 2.1:

- **Target 2.1a:** (Exceeds PLTOF 6)\* Reduce net greenhouse gas emissions in South Downs National Park to net zero by 2040 relative to 1990 levels.

\* **The Government has developed the Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework (PLTOF)** with ten targets for protected landscapes. PLTOF Target 6 aims to reach net zero by 2050).

## OBJECTIVE 2.2: To support land managers, farmers, foresters and landowners in their aspirations to deliver nature recovery and climate action on their land.

The South Downs National Park has been heavily influenced by farming and 70 per cent remains a farmed landscape. Farming practices such as livestock grazing have led to the development of some of our key habitats including chalk grassland.

Farming continues to have a critical role to play in managing land for nature. It faces increasing, and at times conflicting, demands for sustainably grown food for a growing population and climate action.

While farmers have a huge role to play in fighting climate change, they are also on the front lines of dealing with its impacts. It has a direct effect on the land and soils they rely on for their livelihood and on water in the landscape – increasing both drought and flooding. The risks to the sector are significant and supporting them to become more resilient achieves multiple benefits – for food production, for the landscape and nature, and for the rural economy.

Together we must continue to work alongside farmers and landowners to increase climate mitigation and adaptation efforts, developing adaptation responses that also support the economic viability of farming and other rural businesses.

National Parks and other protected landscapes have a key role to play in working with farmers, landowners and developers to demonstrate practical implementation at scale. In the South Downs we will continue to support our ReNature Credits approach, tapping into the increasing potential of private-finance to fund nature-based solutions that are good for nature, people and the planet.



Together we will focus on a number of key areas:

- The development and delivery of sector-based resilience plans.<sup>21</sup>
- Continuing to support and expand the ReNature Credits approach in the South Downs to connect farming businesses with private finance for climate solutions.
- Support landowners looking to create new woodland, providing organisations around the National Park with access to local carbon credits and enabling long-term carbon sequestration.
- Working together to continue to develop a Voluntary Biodiversity Credits market,<sup>22</sup> understanding its role in capturing carbon, to enable organisations to support both carbon sequestration and nature recovery as part of their commitment to climate action.
- Ensuring that farmers have the advice and support they need on nature-friendly farming.

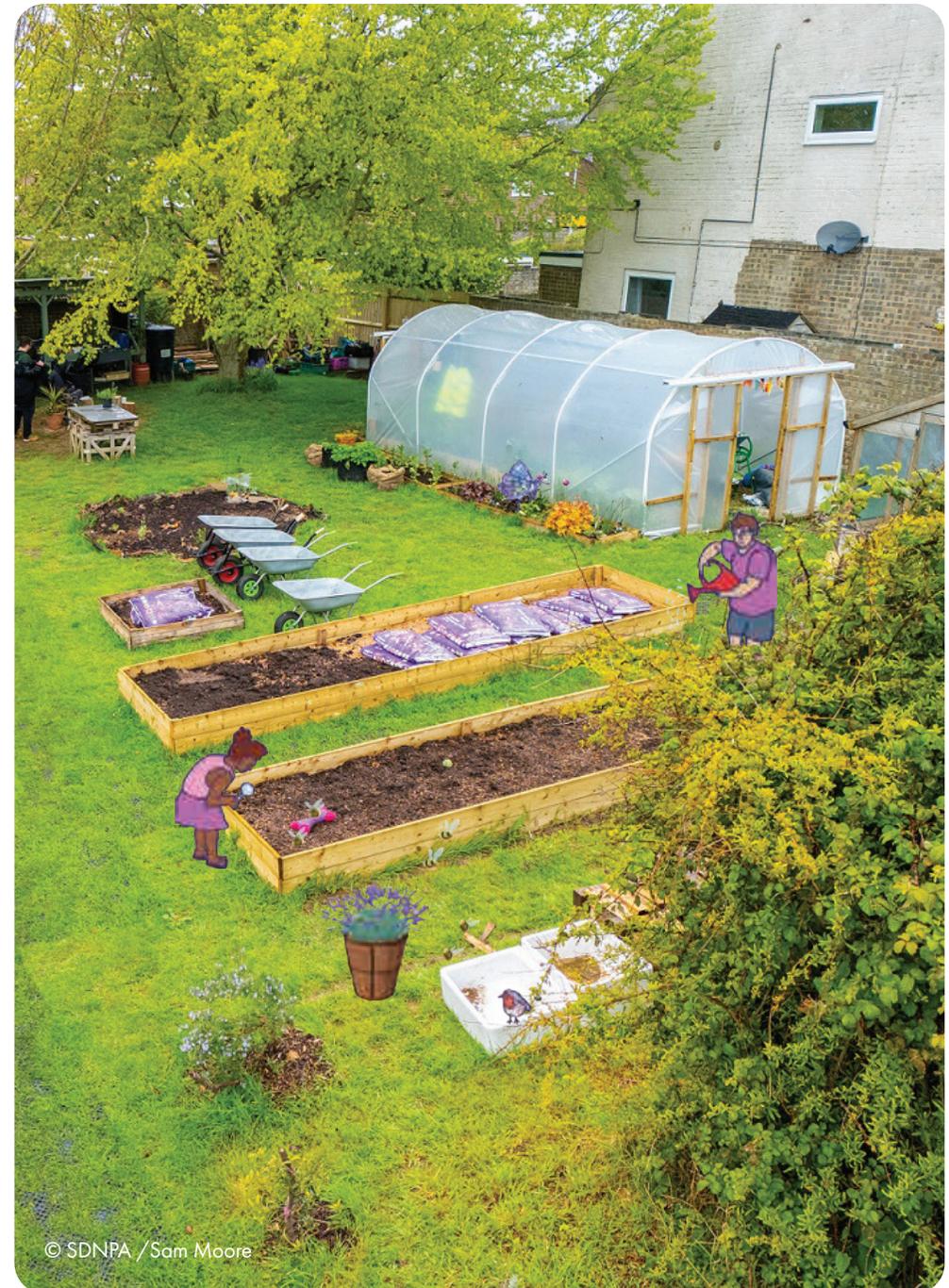
21 NFU (2024) [Sector resilience plans refreshed ahead of 2025 – NFUonline](#).

22 The Voluntary Biodiversity Credits Market utilises the DEFRA Statutory Metric.

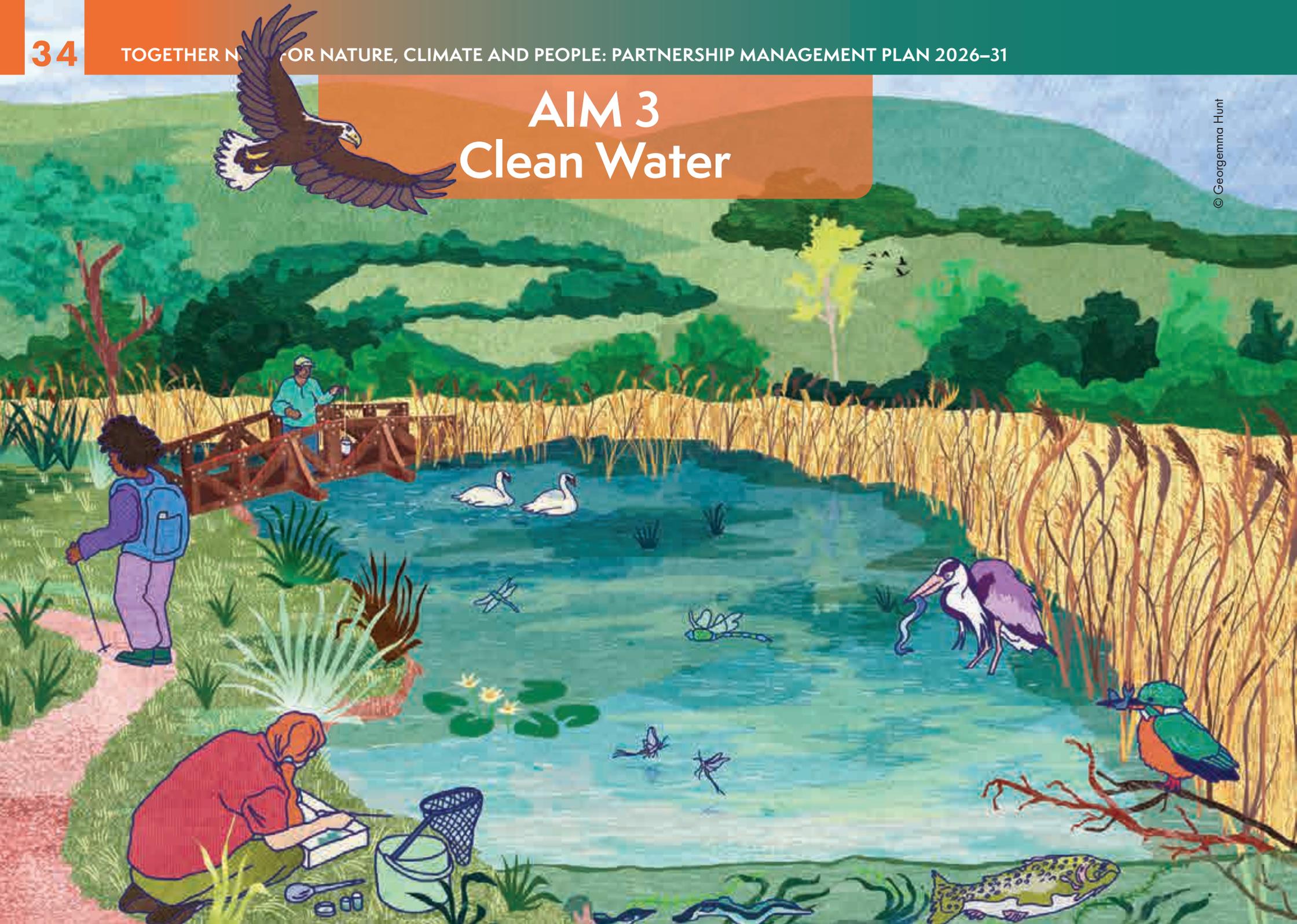
## TARGETS FOR OBJECTIVE 2.2:

- **Target 2.2a:** PLTOF Target 5\*: Ensuring at least 65% to 80% of land managers adopt nature friendly farming on at least 10% to 15% of their land by 2030.
- **Target 2.2b:** Implement regenerative farming practices across 8,000 hectares of the National Park by 2031.
- **Target 2.2c:** (Exceeds PLTOF Target 8): Increase tree canopy and woodland cover across the National Park by 2,625ha by 2031.

\* The Government has developed the Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework (PLTOF) with ten targets for protected landscapes.



# AIM 3 Clean Water



## Clean, abundant water supports nature and communities in the South Downs National Park and beyond.

The South Downs is full of incredible blue spaces vital to nature and people – rivers, chalk streams, ponds, coastline and a huge chalk aquifer that provides water to more than 1.2 million people in and around the National Park.

Water underpins biodiversity, landscape, and the social and economic wellbeing of communities in and around the South Downs National Park, supporting its special qualities.

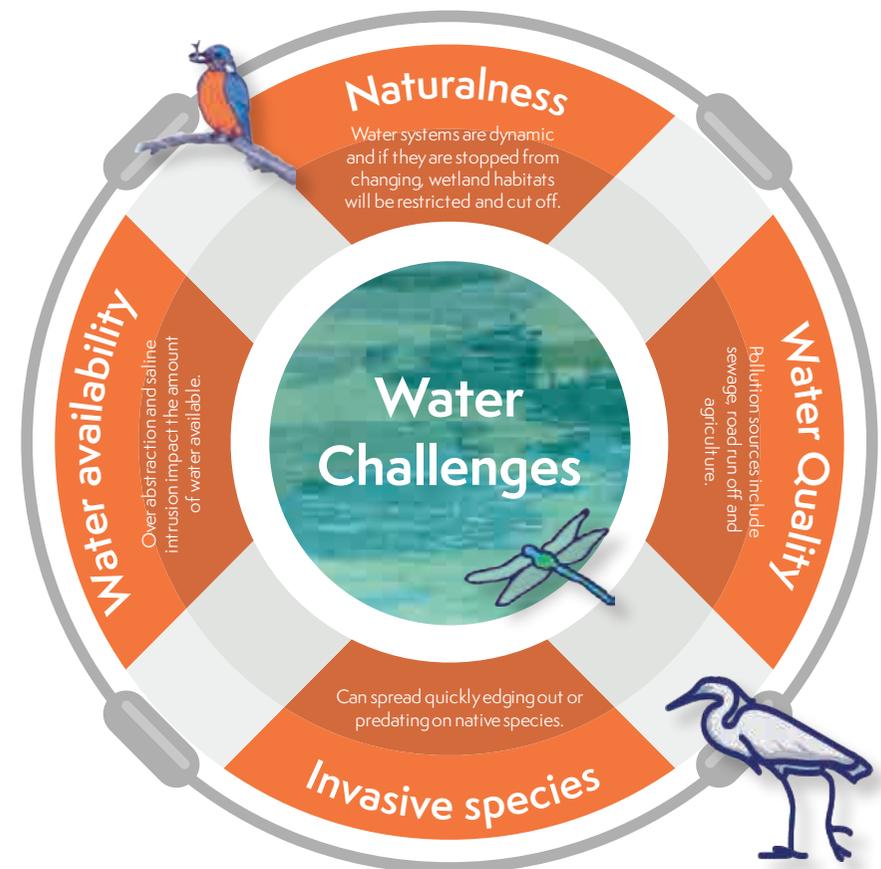
Chalk streams are particularly important in the National Park. There are only 200 chalk streams in the world and most of those can be found in southern England. They have been described as the “English Great Barrier Reef” thanks to their biodiversity. The Rivers Itchen and Meon are chalk streams fed with clear water by the same chalk aquifer that supplies our drinking water.

The porous nature of the chalk landscape means that ponds, such as dew ponds, are a unique source of water for wildlife where no other surface water is present, providing important homes for rare and endangered wildlife.

The National Park has 17.5 miles of coastline along the iconic Sussex Heritage Coast, one of the few undeveloped areas of England’s south-east coastline. This area is home to rare habitats such as salt marsh, mud flats and vegetated shingle. The Heritage Coast extends out into the ocean. The landscape is deeply connected to this marine environment, with the rivers of the National Park flowing into the sea and having an impact on its health. This marine environment also has rare habitats and species including sea kelp and seahorses.<sup>23</sup>

Unfortunately, like in so many parts of the UK, these water environments are under increasing threats from a number of different factors, from pollution to climate change affecting rainfall and water temperatures. The south east of England is also a water-stressed region – meaning that we must look at managing water quantity as well as water quality. Everyone has a role to play in using less water.

**Figure 5: Challenges facing water in the South Downs National Park**



Addressing water issues is complex because it requires a range of approaches, from individual action to national policies and regulation. Water also does not stop at designation boundaries. As can be seen from Figure 6 right, the river catchments of the National Park expand far beyond the boundary. Action to improve water quality and quantity will require work with partners within and across the boundary of the National Park. It will need action from a variety of partners including water companies, developers, planners, industry, landowners and farmers, and householders. Together we are committed to a catchment-based approach that will enable us to work together with partners and the public to restore our diverse water habitats and ensure enough clean water for nature and people.



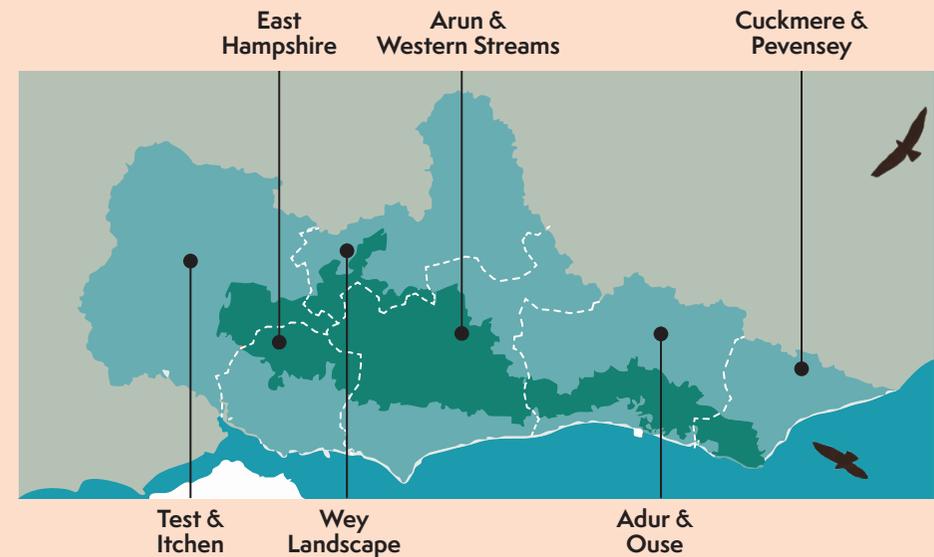
### OBJECTIVE 3.1: To support catchment-based partnership approaches to water management so that nature and communities can thrive, and flood risk is reduced.

Developing catchment partnerships to deliver at scale is key to protecting and enhancing resilience to climate change, restoring biodiversity, improving health and wellbeing and local economies.

There are six catchment partnerships across and around the South Downs National Park. These partnerships bring together a wealth of experience and expertise from dozens of organisations and are supported by volunteers, all working together to better manage our valuable water resources. These partnerships are collectively focused on five key priorities:

- Improving water quality
- Sustainable water management
- Natural flood management
- Protecting and enhancing habitats
- Engagement

Figure 6: Map of catchment partnerships across the South Downs National Park<sup>24</sup>



We will support and work with these partnerships to ensure a joined-up approach to improving our wonderful blue spaces and to securing funding to do so.

#### TARGETS FOR OBJECTIVE 3.1:

- **Target 3.1a:** By 2031, all catchment partnerships to have the resources to develop a pipeline of deliverable projects.
- **Target 3.1b:** Meet the water-related adaptation actions of the SDNPA Climate Change Action Plan.

24 SDNPA, [Water in the Park \(2025\)](#).

### OBJECTIVE 3.2: To improve the condition of the water environment to ensure enough clean water for nature and people, and water habitats are restored.

Everyone can play a part in ensuring there is enough clean water for nature and people. Individuals and businesses can use water wisely and check their wastewater is going to the right place. They can also become citizen scientists to monitor water quality or volunteer to help remove invasive species. Planning plays its part by ensuring building is in the appropriate places and is water efficient, using natural flood management solutions like sustainable urban drainage. Water companies can help by delivering their planned wastewater plant upgrades, supporting people with wise water use and landowners in their work to reduce pollution from agricultural sources. Landowners can contribute by safeguarding water courses and reducing sediment and chemical run off.

Protecting our groundwater at source through appropriate land management, development, water use and management is crucial. We are committed to working with our catchment partnerships to encourage better use and management of this finite and essential resource.

Restoring our water habitats – both large and small, is key to nature recovery. They provide homes to some of our most iconic and at-risk species from kingfishers, to water voles, to invertebrates. Healthy wetlands and rivers can also provide communities with protection from flooding by holding water in the landscape and slowing the flow of water.



© Dick Hawkes

We will support the restoration of our water habitats from large-scale restoration of internationally important wetlands, to intertidal habitat on our coastline, to the revival of dew ponds, so synonymous with the chalk grassland of the South Downs and which support almost three-quarters of all freshwater species found in lowland landscapes.

#### TARGETS FOR OBJECTIVE 3.2:

- **Target 3.2a:** All waterbodies within the National Park to achieve “high” or “good” status by 2027.



# PEOPLE & PLACE





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“ Look deep into nature, and then you will understand everything better. ”

ALBERT EINSTEIN

**The South Downs is a living, changing landscape that has been shaped by, and shaped the lives of, the people who have chosen to live here. Its beauty has inspired the work of artists and storytellers and continues to do so today.**

As the most populated National Park in the busiest part of the UK with 19 million visitors each year, it provides a vital space for people to connect with nature, and to enjoy all of the benefits to health and wellbeing that brings. It is truly the landscape where people and place come together.

People – those who live, work and visit here – are the greatest asset for the South Downs. It is their connection, care and actions that will determine the National Park of the future.

When John Dower envisioned what UK National Parks should be in his 1943 paper, he said that *“National Parks are not for any privileged or otherwise restricted section of the population, but for all who come to refresh their minds and spirit, and exercise their bodies in a peaceful setting of natural beauty.”*

However, we know that many barriers face large parts of our communities in accessing the South Downs and other National Parks. Young people, people with disabilities, those from ethnically diverse backgrounds and those with lower incomes, for example, are far less likely to have the means or opportunity to enjoy the benefits of their National Park. We want to work with communities to better understand and address these barriers to help everyone who wants to, to be able to access and enjoy the South Downs National Park. We want everyone to feel welcome and that they belong here.



# AIM 4

## Young people



## Young people will have opportunities to access training and skills to enable them to take action to care for and enhance the South Downs National Park.

A close relationship with nature really matters to young people (under 25s). It affects how they feel and function, as well as their resilience to the challenges life can bring.<sup>25</sup> Yet, as young people's concern for the natural world and our planet has grown, their access to it has not. Young people are being burdened with the worries for the future of nature and our planet without having the access or opportunities to do something about it. While we will continue to work with people of all ages, this aim seeks to address this issue and to create the opportunities young people need to become the future custodians of the National Park.

For some young people the disconnect is even greater. In England:

- 18 per cent of young people living in the most deprived areas never visit the natural environment<sup>26</sup>; and
- ethnically diverse children are four times as likely to have no access to outdoor space.<sup>27</sup>

The Government's new National Youth Strategy is looking to address the challenges facing young people today and will develop a youth-led approach to supporting young people and youth policymaking. Engaging young people in decision making about the future of the South Downs National Park is key. The input of youth voices into the development of this Partnership

Plan has been crucial to ensuring that its priorities deliver for the needs of young people and support their role as future custodians. Fostering longer term relationships with nature instils a sense of responsibility towards the environment and encourages long-term outdoor engagement.

The South Downs offers fantastic opportunities for young people to be in nature, to learn outside, enhance their health and wellbeing, experience heritage, have fun, build a future career, and take positive action to enhance the National Park now and in the future. Whether it be a school trip, a university project, a Youth Action practical conservation day or a heritage skills taster day, it's these memorable experiences that can inspire a lifetime of caring for the environment.

There are 893 schools supporting 500,000 young people in and around the South Downs and 69 per cent of them visit the National Park each year, with three Ambassador Schools offering peer-to-peer support, inspiration and host visits for schools, colleges and other learning providers. We are lucky to have a significant number of universities and further education establishments in and around the National Park. This creates an opportunity for young people to take an active role in the National Park through research, projects, volunteering and other activities, as well as providing space to support their health and wellbeing.

National Parks were designated for the nation, and we want young people from the wider south east and London to be able to experience time outdoors in the South Downs and all the benefits that brings. Such experiences can be life-changing.

In 2024, the Explorers of the South Downs programme enabled 1,430 young people from 40 school groups from disadvantaged areas to explore the nature, history and culture of the National Park. Over 40 per cent of pupils were accessing Free School Meals, 23 per cent had special needs, and, in

25 Nature Connectedness research from the University of Derby report on Generation Green.

26 Natural England, **The Children's People and Nature Survey for England: 2024 update – GOV.UK.**

27 **ONS Census 2021.**

one school alone, over 50 per cent identified as from ethnically diverse communities.

In another example, young people from across the south east attended residential summer camps to develop a deeper connection to nature, experience hands-on work to take practical action for the natural world, grow their leadership skills, and build strong, nurturing relationships with a network of peers who share their values<sup>28</sup>:

“ I hope that everyone gets this opportunity once in their lives. It is quite amazing and life-changing. It makes you open your mind and open your eyes to see the world in different ways. ”

Anali, aged 14 from Essex

We want to create more opportunities for more young people like Anali to engage with nature, climate and heritage; and to be able to access the training and skills needed to access green careers.

<sup>28</sup> The camps were run by Action for Conservation and funded by the South Downs National Park Trust. 39% of the young people were from ethnically diverse communities, 11% had special educational needs and disabilities, and 21% were from lower socio-economic backgrounds. 100% of young people took part in nature restoration activities.



## OBJECTIVE 4.1: To provide opportunities for young people to take positive action for nature, climate and cultural heritage.

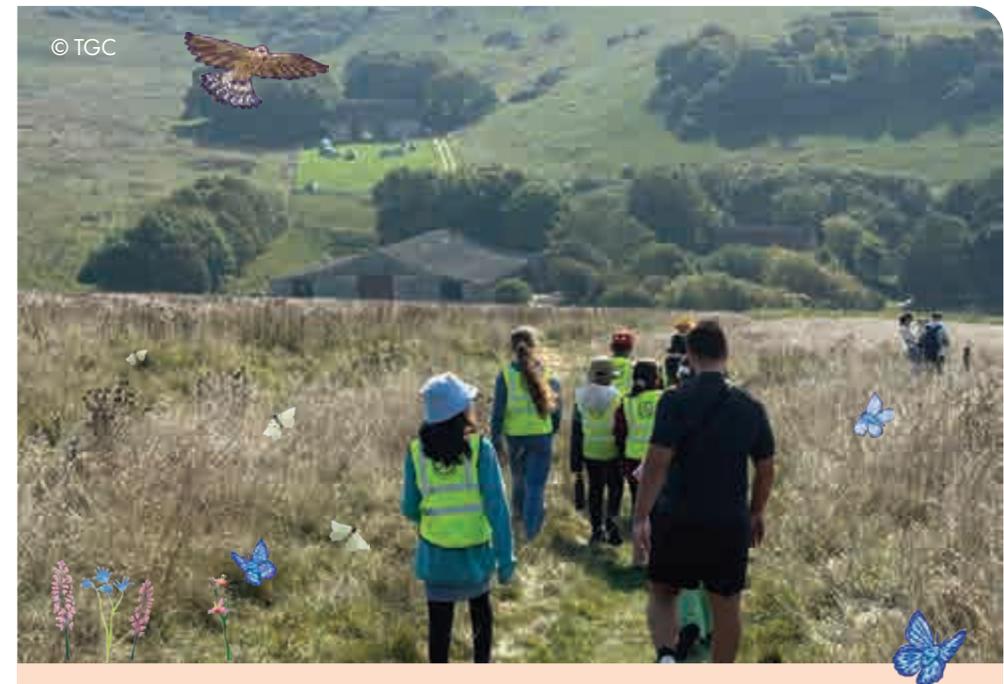
Young people are the future custodians of the South Downs and have a positive role to play in helping to shape its future. Positive relationships with universities and further education providers is vital to provide opportunities to develop the understanding, knowledge and skills needed in our future custodians.

The nature and climate crises pose a significant threat, not only to the environment but to young people's mental well-being. Eco-anxiety amongst young people is on the rise and having opportunities to take positive action is important in supporting young people to feel that they can be part of the solution.

Natural England's *Children's People and Nature Survey (2024)*, showed that 83 per cent of children and young people surveyed agreed that looking after the environment was important to them. Many reported already doing a range of things to look after the environment. Most children and young people said that they would like to do more as their actions can help save wildlife and support good health. It also makes being in nature a better experience for them.

A lack of access to the skills, knowledge or confidence to understand the natural environment is a barrier to young people taking action.

We are committed to providing more opportunities to enable young people from all backgrounds to experience nature first-hand, benefit from the multiple benefits it brings and to give something back to nature, climate and people. Working in partnership with young people



themselves, youth organisations and sector specialists will enable us to grow the opportunities for young people to take positive action, and the number and diversity of young people who are able to access these opportunities.

### TARGETS FOR OBJECTIVE 4.1:

- **Target 4.1a:** (PLTOF Access for All metrics) 2,500 schools engaged (primary and secondary) both inside and outside the National Park boundary per year.
- **Target 4.1b:** Work in partnership to deliver 500 youth activity sessions, so that young people will have opportunities to take positive action for nature, climate and heritage in the National Park by 2031.

## OBJECTIVE 4.2: To support young people on the pathway to green careers.

The Government Green Jobs Taskforce identifies Green Careers as a huge economic growth area with an ambition for 2 million green jobs and the need for at least 480,000 skilled green jobs by 2030. These “green skills” are also key to us meeting the needs of a low-carbon economy.<sup>29,30</sup>

Our built heritage and our distinctive towns and villages form the basis of two of our seven special qualities. Traditional crafts and skills are essential to maintaining the character and unique feel of the National Park. Reaching net zero while protecting heritage across the National Park also means that we need the skills to sensitively adapt historic buildings through green energy and carbon reduction improvements.

However, there is a gap in green skills and traditional crafts across the National Park. Historic England analysis nationally has shown that more than 40 per cent of contractors working with traditional methods have trouble recruiting and the age profile of those working in the sector is increasing.<sup>31</sup>

The Heritage Crafts’ Red List of Endangered Crafts identifies 23 of 40 building conservation<sup>32</sup> crafts as endangered, critically endangered, or extinct, including skills like brickmaking and hurdle making. As the



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number of skilled craftspeople declines, we risk not being able to pass these skills on to the next generation. This means fewer career options for young people in caring for the National Park, and risks not being able to maintain the heritage and character of the National Park and ensure its buildings and communities are adapted for the future.

It can be very difficult for young people to find ways into learning and careers in environmental work and traditional skills. Green careers are not universally understood and are not seen as a viable career choice by many young people.

*“I have really enjoyed seeing students get hands on with the activities, which they wouldn’t usually get to do. It has been fantastic to see what heritage crafts actually are and how important it is to keep these trades alive.”* Youseff Wilson, Learning Support, Chichester College commenting after a Heritage Taster Day.

29 [Green Jobs Taskforce report – GOV.UK.](#)

30 [National Careers Service – Explore green careers.](#)

31 Brennan, J., Legard, J., and Purdy, K. (2024) *(Skills Needs Analysis For the Repair, Maintenance and Retrofit of Traditional (pre-1919) Buildings in England, Historic England.*

32 Heritage Crafts, The Red List.

Over half of all participants surveyed in the New to Nature programme<sup>33</sup> believe that careers in the environmental sector are not accessible to people from ethnically diverse backgrounds and/or working-class backgrounds, and two thirds perceive the sector as inaccessible for individuals with disabilities and long-term health conditions. Reported barriers included a lack of experience, lack of entry level jobs, requirement for volunteering/other unpaid experience that precludes those on low incomes, and the need for formal qualifications.

We need to work together to develop clear pathways into green and heritage careers for young people from all backgrounds, whether that be as rangers and conservationists or skilled traditional craftspeople. This includes more opportunities for training and skills development, an increase in work-related learning opportunities including paid internships and apprenticeships, and greater awareness of the diverse range of viable green career opportunities.

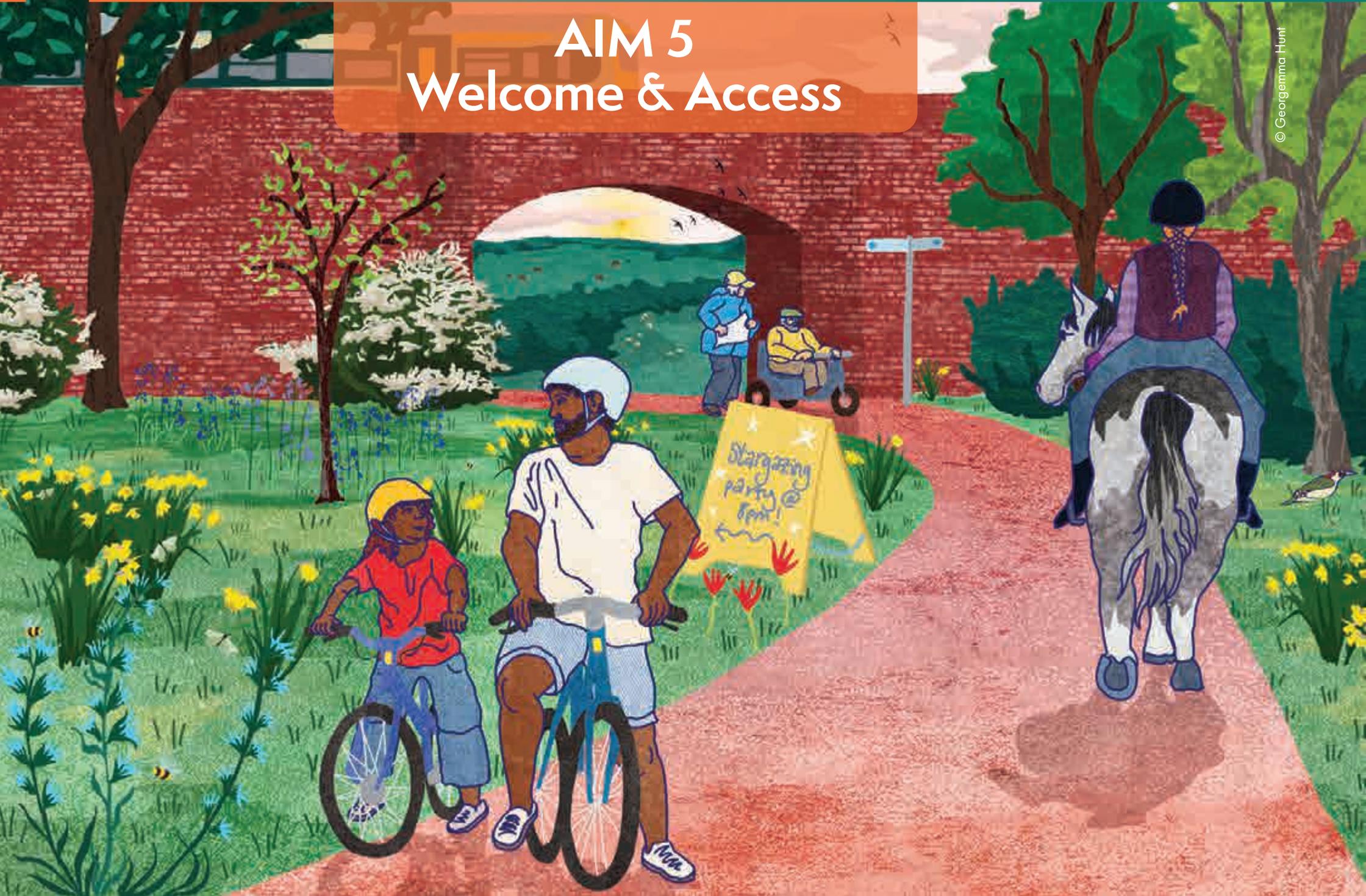
### TARGETS FOR OBJECTIVE 4.2:

- **Target 4.2a:** By 2031, provide work-related learning, skills development, and experiential sessions to a minimum of 2,500 young people.



# AIM 5

## Welcome & Access



## A valued South Downs National Park is welcoming and accessible to all.

Every year the South Downs welcomes 19 million visitors. With over 3,300km of rights of way, two National Trails (the South Downs Way and the King Charles III England Coast Path), new trails connecting the urban fringe into the heart of the National Park, breathtaking landscapes, a wealth of heritage to be explored, lively market towns and picture-perfect villages, it is easy to understand why.

Over 113,000 people call the National Park home in its towns, villages and rural communities, and another 2 million people live within 10km. This National Park is therefore providing access to nature, green space, health and wellbeing opportunities, dark night skies, a living classroom for young people, and much more, to millions of people in the busiest part of the UK.

Access also has an important role to play in supporting the local economy and in helping us to reach net zero. A key focus for us to benefit people, nature and the planet, is to provide better access from the urban fringe, supporting people to access the National Park by public transport or active travel – walking, wheeling, cycling and horse riding. The National Park has a range of overnight accommodation for visitors. A range of different types of visitor accommodation is important to support different needs and budgets, making the National Park more accessible to more people.<sup>34</sup>

Together we are committed to giving everybody the opportunity to get out and enjoy the National Park. Along with our Miles Without Stiles routes, we've really been able to increase our offering to people with mobility challenges and other needs thanks to a grant in 2023 from Defra which enabled us to

purchase mobility scooters and accessible bicycles at various key sites.<sup>35</sup> At Seven Sisters Country Park, the only part of the National Park the Authority owns and manages, we have put accessibility at the heart of our work, with an accessibility guide on the website,<sup>36</sup> a Changing Places toilet, Miles without Stiles route, an audio trail, accessible bikes, scooters and kayaks. For those who can't get to us, we are working with partners to bring the National Park to them, through virtual walks, podcasts and 3D filming.

However, we also know that barriers to access are not all physical. Cost, transport, a lack of confidence or knowledge, and a fear of the National Park not being welcoming are just some of the barriers stopping individuals and whole communities from accessing the National Park. Public transport – or a lack of public transport – continues to be a barrier for many people to visiting and enjoying the National Park. We are working with partners to change this but know that there is still much to be done and for us to learn to support a truly welcoming and accessible National Park.



34 [South Downs Visitor Accommodation Review – South Downs National Park Authority \(2025\)](#).

35 [South Downs National Park online Accessibility Hub](#).

36 [Seven Sisters Country Park Accessibility Guide Accessibility – Seven Sisters](#).

How people want to access the National Park is also changing. While walking and cycling remain ever popular, people are now wanting to experience our landscapes in different ways. They want to spend time with family and friends, to take action on climate and biodiversity loss, to have a positive impact on their mental health, to be inspired by the landscape to create, art, music and writing, to experience dark, starry skies and, sometimes, to just be. An accessible National Park is also about understanding and providing for the various ways people want to experience the landscape. This means easy access to information and inspiration, it means knowing what's out there, how to get there, when to go and above all, feeling like the National Park is for you.

At the heart of access is connection and a feeling of belonging, being part of a wider and wonderfully diverse National Park community united in a common purpose to enjoy and care for your National Park.



## OBJECTIVE 5.1: To improve the accessibility of the National Park to enable everyone to actively travel and connect with nature and cultural heritage.

“Accessible” means different things to different people. For some, it is about being able to physically access a space. For others, it can be an ability to access transport or feeling welcome and safe.

We are also aware that not every part of the National Park can be accessible to all. The shared goal is partnership working to increase the opportunities for everyone to access the National Park.

Enabling people to access the National Park starts well before they leave home. It is ensuring they feel welcome and then providing the information they need to plan their visit – whether that be a quick walk from a neighbouring area or travelling from further afield. Everyone should be able to access information relevant to their needs about how they can connect with the South Downs.

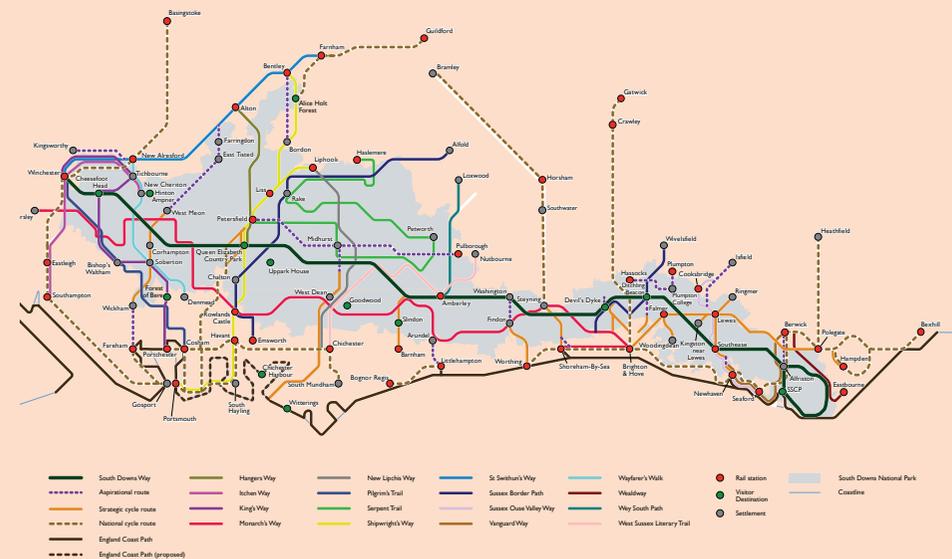
We are committed to bringing the National Park to people where they are – through online and digital content to inform and inspire. We are working with partners to provide onsite information. We are also broadening our partnerships to gather and share new voices and experiences of the National Park.

Our rights of way network – the largest in any National Park and including the entire 100-mile South Downs Way National Trail – is a jewel in the crown of the South Downs. However, it can be greatly improved through relatively small interventions, including removing obstacles such as stiles or steps where possible, improving the surfaces and just maintaining vegetation to increase accessibility and support

nature. Improving difficult crossings of roads or developing new off-road routes where missing links exist will greatly enhance the usability of our existing network.

A little over 4 per cent of the National Park land area is Access Land<sup>37</sup> (under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000). Unlike many of England’s upland National Parks which have large continuous areas of Access Land, that in the South Downs is generally small, fragmented areas of downland or heathland. During the lifetime of this Partnership Management Plan, the National Park Authority will work with Natural England to review the current Access Land Open Country mapping, with a view to making this valuable asset more usable.

**Figure 7: Cycling and Walking Routes, Trails and Aspirations**



<sup>37</sup> What is commonly known as “Access Land” or “Open Access Land” is statutory Open Country under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.

Reducing our reliance on cars to access the National Park is vital to reach net zero and to overcome the barriers faced by those who do not own cars. To do this we must provide accessible, convenient routes into and through the National Park that connect communities into the heart of the landscape and to travel between areas of the National Park. The National Park Authority has worked with partners to develop a South Downs Active Travel Network Plan to prioritise joint action to deliver Active Travel improvements over the life of this Plan. We must also work with transport and other partners to maximise public transport opportunities and to provide information at public transport sites to enable onward travel and enjoyment.

### TARGETS FOR OBJECTIVE 5.1: \*

- **Target 5.1a:** PLTOF Target 9: By 2031, 300km (10%) of the National Park's public Rights of Way network is in good condition and 'accessible'.
- **Target 5.1b:** By 2031 pilot 5 digital accessibility mapping surveys to provide network wide accessibility information.
- **Target 5.1c:** Increase Active Travel to and within the National Park year on year through the delivery of Active Travel network improvements and infrastructure.
- **Target 5.1d:** By 2031, improve sustainable access across the South Downs National Park by expanding public transport services to key visitor hubs and gateway towns.

\* We will measure "accessible" in relation to our access network as routes which meet the "By all Reasonable Means" designation of "Paths for Some" or above. These routes must have no steps, stiles or barriers restricting access, have no gradient steeper than 1:10 and have a width of over 1m.



**OBJECTIVE 5.2:** Increase the darkness of the National Park's International Dark Sky Reserve to support nature recovery and improve understanding of and access to dark skies for all.

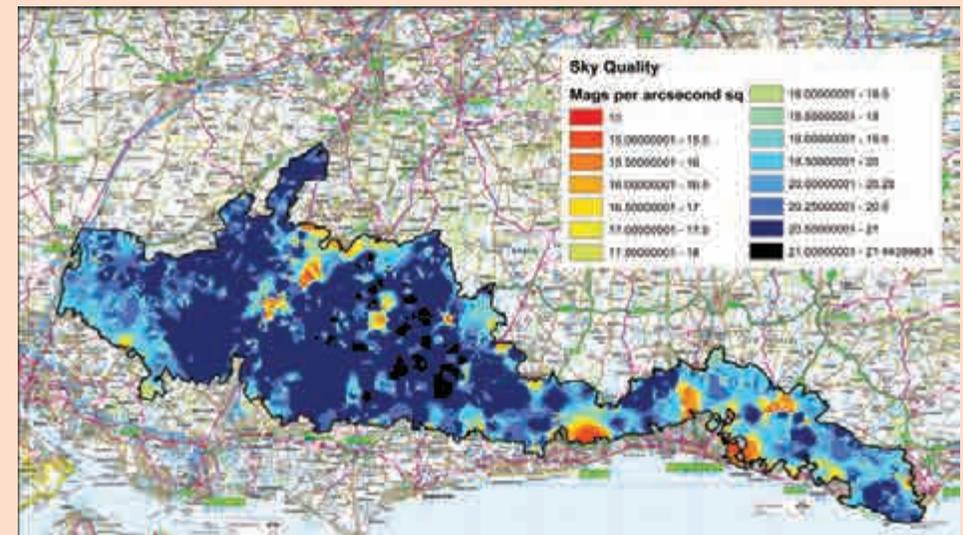
“The night sky is a library of stories that we have been telling ourselves for thousands of years.”

Neil deGrasse Tyson

In 2016, the South Downs National Park became the second International Dark Sky Reserve in England, one of only 23 in the whole world today. To be recognised as an International Dark Sky Reserve we had to demonstrate that our starry skies and nocturnal environment were exceptional, and to commit to introduce people to the stars and the wildlife that thrives in the darkness. Situated in the busy south east, we are the closest dark night sky for over 17 million people.

Launched in 2020, the Annual Star Count 2023<sup>38</sup> found that over 51 per cent of people in the UK are living with severe light pollution and only 5 per cent of respondents said they could count over 30 stars in the Orion constellation. Yet in 2020, 98.8 per cent said that ‘every child should be able to experience the wonder of a star-filled night sky’. Sadly, for many children, this will be an unknown experience. Light pollution can also have a detrimental impact on our natural rhythm, impacting our health and wellbeing.

Figure 8: Dark Skies Map of the South Downs National Park



Every February the National Park works with partners to run a Dark Skies Festival, a chance for people to come out at night and see the wonder of our skies. What we have found is that there is magic in those stars, for our dark skies are a common and universal language – their wonder speaks to people of all ages, all backgrounds and all heritages. For some it provides tranquillity, an uplifting wellbeing boost, a sense of awe and a chance to connect with times and people past. For others it provides a familiar feel of home and a sense of connection and belonging in a new home.

So, our dark skies play an important role in welcoming new audiences to access the National Park and to build a connection with it.

A light-polluted sky also has a negative impact on wildlife, disrupting the rhythms of key nocturnal species. This can lead to a decline in insects, birds, bats and other species. In the South Downs, 17 out of

the UK's 18 native bat species have been recorded and it is also a haven for owls, moths, churring nightjars and other creatures. If we are to ReNature the South Downs and ensure nature everywhere, for everyone, we cannot ignore the many creatures that depend on darkness.

So dark and starry skies are good for people and for wildlife. They can also play an important role in building a thriving rural economy. Dark skies are best viewed over the winter months when tourism businesses are typically quiet. We have created a "Dark Skies Welcome" for businesses and there is real potential to grow dark skies tourism.

We worked closely with local authorities and other partners to minimise light pollution and achieve our International Dark Sky Reserve status. Now we must work together again to ensure that we not only maintain but improve the quality of our dark skies for this and future generations to come.

### TARGETS FOR OBJECTIVE 5.2:

- **Target 5.2a:** Expand the current dark sky core of the International Dark Sky Reserve by 10% by 2031.
- **Target 5.2b:** All lighting authorities in the National Park to adopt 3000K (kelvin) (correlated colour temperature (CCT)) lighting in areas outside and around the National Park, and 2200K inside the National Park, in their lighting policies.

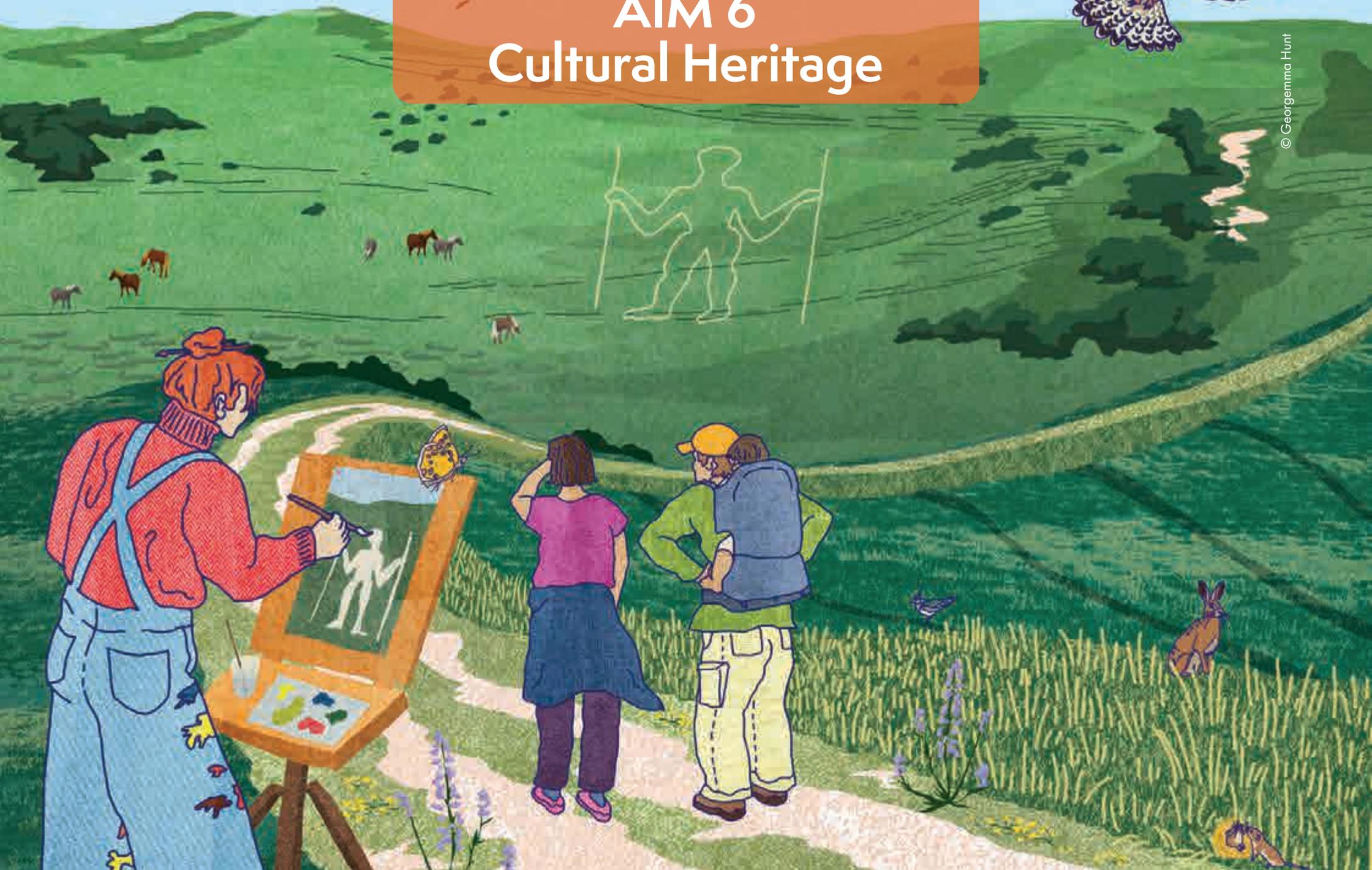






© Georgemma Hunt

# AIM 6 Cultural Heritage



Cultural heritage in the South Downs National Park is conserved, enjoyed, valued, created and passed on for future generations.

The South Downs is a landscape rich in history and culture shaped by many different people over time. Each has left a mark on the landscape and shaped what we see and cherish today. This landscape also continues to inspire and be shaped by and shape the people who live and visit here. Each generation to come will do the same – leave a footprint, define an experience, create a legacy and inspire those who live and visit here.

Figure 9: Cultural Heritage of the South Downs National Park



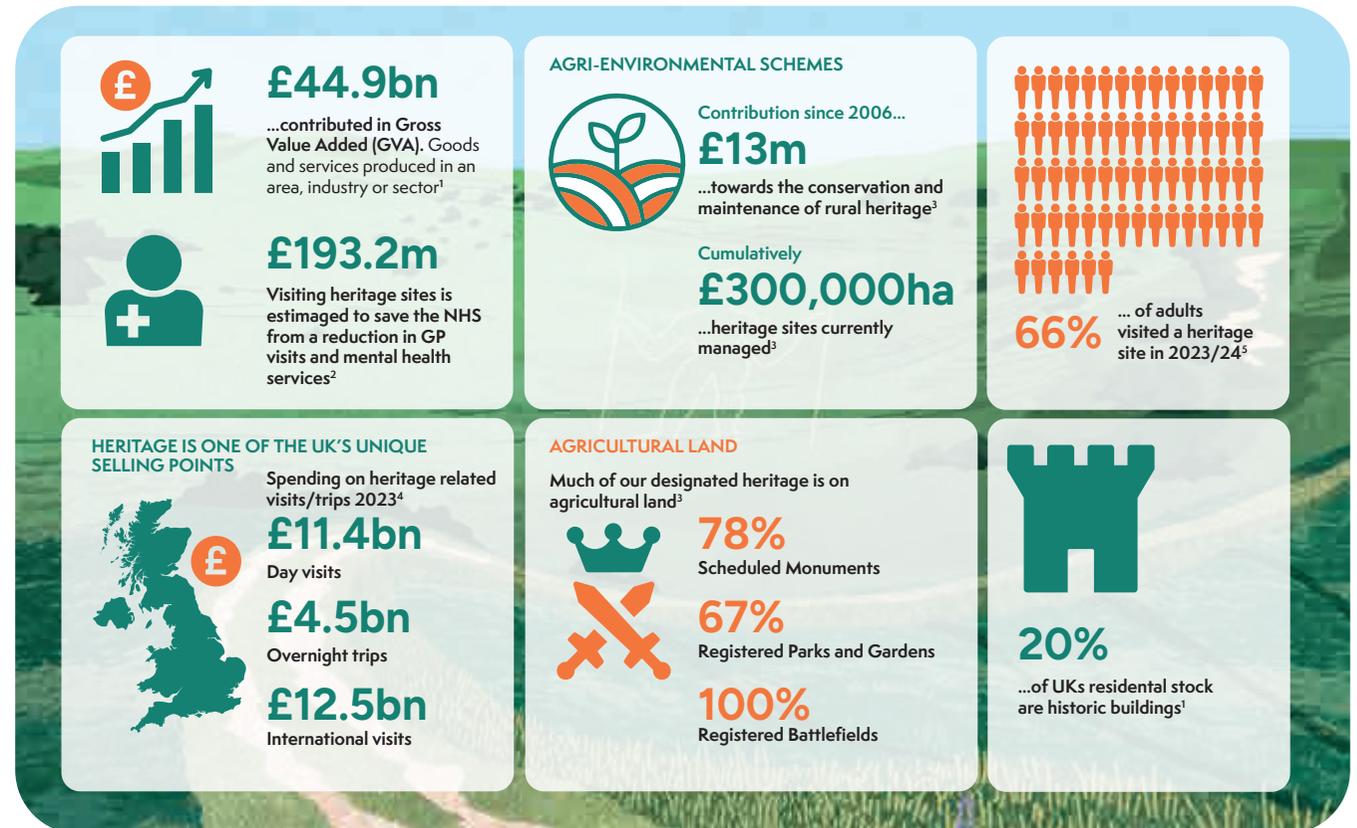
A number of the South Down’s heritage assets can be linked to nature recovery. Over 160 or 28 per cent of the Scheduled Monuments in the National Park are located on Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), with their condition used as an indicator of overall SSSI health. Heritage

protections can deliver positive outcomes for nature, for example, the recognition that archaeological earthworks such as Iron Age hillforts provide unique habitats, as their heritage status limits intensive activities, and their form and structure providing sheltered conditions via

banks and ditches.<sup>39,40</sup> As is captured in the first purpose of National Parks, the conservation of the natural and the heritage landscape often go hand in hand.

Although Heritage at Risk in the South Downs is very low, around 41 per cent of Scheduled Monuments in the National Park were considered to be vulnerable and/or in declining condition at the date of their last site assessment.<sup>41</sup> Just like natural habitats, they are vulnerable to a range of factors, such as intensive land use, lack of management, climate change, etc, and even a lack of knowledge or awareness can lead to decisions that unwittingly impact their conservation. They can also be impacted by irresponsible behaviour such as digging, fires and unlawful metal detecting. Together we need to improve the quality and frequency of data we capture on condition, and to build better understanding and care for these priceless and unique assets.

Figure 10: Financial Value of Culture and Heritage



1. [The Economic Value of the Heritage Sector | Heritage Counts | Historic England](#).
2. [Improving Mental Health Through Heritage | Heritage Counts | Historic England](#).
3. [Support and Funding for Rural Heritage | Historic England](#).
4. [The Contribution of the Heritage Sector to the Visitor Economy | Heritage Counts | Historic England](#).
5. [DCMS Participation Survey 2023/24](#).

39 [Butterfly Conservation: Organisation: Home page | Butterfly Conservation](#).

40 [Example from Sussex/South Downs where hillfort provides ideal habitat for butterflies](#).

41 Wessex Archaeology (2021) South Downs National Park: Scheduled Ancient Monuments Study.

Advances in technology provide real opportunities to monitor and preserve our heritage assets. In recent years, for example, the use of LIDAR technology enabled the identification of heritage assets long since buried under woodland. Partnerships with academics and organisations leading the way with new technologies are vital to help us better understand, protect and share the secrets of our heritage assets to inspire new generations. Such advances also provide opportunities for citizen scientists to become actively involved in their preservation. While some heritage assets are protected by law, many others are not, and we must work together to ensure that these physical stories of our past can remain part of our rich future.

Our cultural heritage underpins the heart of the South Downs and its unique sense of place. It also has a real financial value through tourism and through its contribution to the health and wellbeing of those who engage with it/enjoy it.<sup>42</sup>

Engaging with culture and heritage improves the health and wellbeing of UK adults by £8 billion every year via societal benefits, healthcare savings and productivity increases. This compliments and supports the role of National Parks as a 'Natural Health Service' for the nation.<sup>43</sup>

The South Downs' cultural heritage will continue to grow and change over time and, while there are significant challenges – from failing infrastructure and a lack of funding and resources across cultural and heritage organisations, to nature loss and climate change – there are also opportunities. Our shared heritage tells us about past land use and can help us to make decisions for the future, and how we can work with this landscape to adapt and thrive in changing times.

With a changing climate, and changing community needs, our heritage can be part of the conversations we have about everything from housing provision to energy independence. The ability to adapt older buildings to accommodate green energy solutions to reduce carbon impacts and reduce energy costs for residents makes the need for retrofit and the associated skills to adapt older buildings essential for the future.<sup>44</sup>

Our cultural heritage is also how we as individuals and communities connect with place and often experience sense of place. The stories we tell about the South Downs landscape are unique to this place and our interaction with it over time, from our buildings to our folklore, to the stories being crafted by new voices experiencing the National Park for the first time. We must not only protect the past but provide opportunities to create the cultural heritage of the future through creative arts developed with and by communities; through sensitive design; and through new stories of our landscape, told by voices both familiar and new.



42 © Natural England, **Nature Recovery and the Historic Environment**.

43 DCMS (2024) **Culture and Heritage Capital: Monetising The Impact of Culture and Heritage on Health and Wellbeing**.

44 Historic England have estimated that there is potential to provide 560,000-670,000 new homes in England via retrofit and repurposing options for vacant historic (pre-1919) building stock. **Historic England (percentage of UK housing stock of pre-1919 date): Historic England (potential housing available if disused historic buildings brought into use as residential)**.

## OBJECTIVE 6.1: Increase conservation, awareness, access and understanding of cultural heritage in the National Park.

There have been signs left for us about how people in the past managed the land – from Prehistoric and Roman field systems to holloways and pollen samples encased in the soils beneath our feet. Stories from the past are being uncovered all the time and these can help us plan our future. This knowledge may help us to adapt to changes happening now, while heritage protections of some of these key sites can also provide a safe haven for nature. So, heritage also helps us plan for the future and has a key role to play in supporting nature recovery today.

However, our historic places are facing many threats. A lack of funding and resources, lack of traditional skills continuing, development pressures, changes in land management and funding schemes, nature depletion and climate change, among others, is limiting capacity and increasing threats to those places.

We must continue to come together to ensure our wonderful historic places are in a good condition and are better understood, so that they can be enjoyed by future generations. This includes looking at the sensitive retrofitting and adaptation of our historic buildings. We must also continue to learn from the past so that we can use that knowledge to adapt to the challenges facing our landscape now and in the future. And we must recognise the benefits that heritage can deliver for nature.



Together we will work to support partnerships and initiatives that advance our knowledge of the landscape, and that connect people to the landscape, support nature recovery and inform climate adaptation.

### TARGETS FOR OBJECTIVE 6.1:

- **Target 6.1a:** PLTOF Target 10: Decrease the number of nationally designated heritage assets at risk in Protected Landscapes.
- **Target 6.2b:** 200 scheduled Monuments to have enhanced or updated condition records on the National Heritage List for England (NHLE) by 2031.
- **Target 6.1c:** By 2031, to have increased the number of heritage assets covered by agri-environment schemes.

## OBJECTIVE 6.2: Promote connection to the landscape and its special qualities through archaeology, traditional crafts, contemporary arts and diverse storytelling.

Heritage is, at its heart, the stories of our past. Telling stories was how we passed on our knowledge, our traditions and how we built communities. Today, it is a key way in which we understand and connect to the landscape around us.

The shape of the land itself influences our stories and myths. Legend says that the distinctive ridges curling around Bignor Hill were cut by a giant worm wrapping his enormous tail around the hill. Meanwhile a fearsome dragon guards his marvellous hoard of gold and precious stones in an underground tunnel near Cissbury Ring. Our museums are full of objects found in the landscape that help us understand how people interacted with it, and our galleries full of work by artists who were inspired by the landscape.

In addition to supporting the traditional heritage crafts that have given our built heritage its uniqueness (see Objective 4.2 on page 46), we want to support engagement through archaeology, museums, art and heritage. We want more people to discover, develop skills and enhance their wellbeing by connecting to this place. We want to use our past to inform a positive future.

We must look after our heritage and remember that it is being created all the time as the South Downs continues to inspire the creativity of our artists, writers and musicians. These are the cultural icons of the future, the contributors to our sense of place. The creative industries are a priority sector in the 2025 Industrial Strategy and the National



© Jeff Travis

Park provides real opportunities for creatives clusters that focus on nature, place and people.

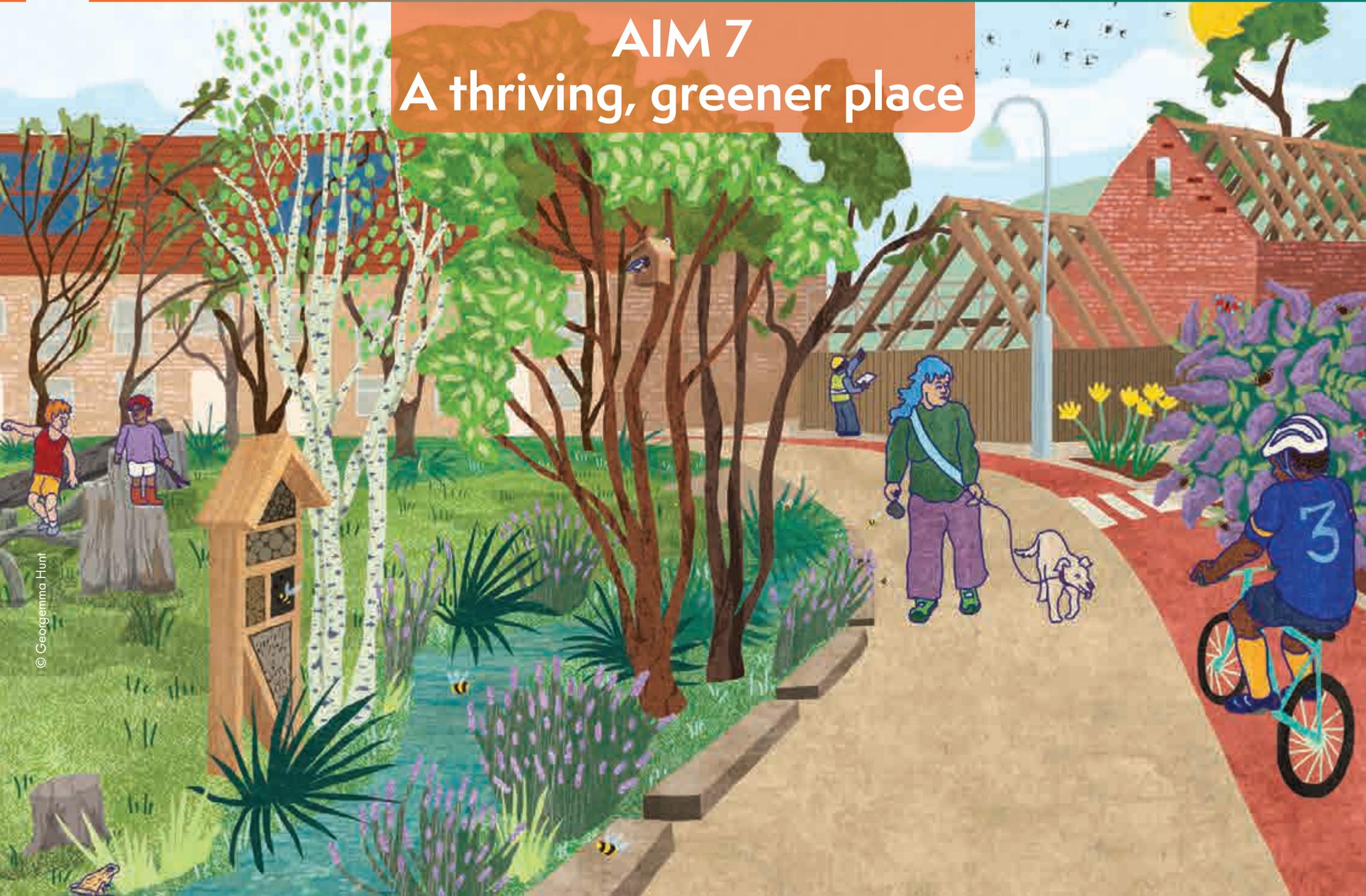
We will do this by focusing on supporting projects co-developed with or led by communities who want to tell traditional stories in new ways or who want to tell stories yet untold about this landscape. Through advice, support and signposting, and, where appropriate, through fundraising, we want to further the potential for connection to nature and landscape through creativity and discovery. We also want to support collaboration between artists, archaeologists and museums, so we explore new ways of communicating old stories to new audiences.

### TARGETS FOR OBJECTIVE 6.2:

- **Target 6.2a:** 2000 people are engaged in nature and landscape through arts and heritage engagement activities by 2031.
- **Target 6.2b:** by 2031, 100 new creative arts responses to the wildlife, heritage and landscape of the South Downs have been produced.

## AIM 7

### A thriving, greener place



## A thriving rural economy and local communities sit at the heart of the South Downs National Park.

The South Downs is home to over 113,000 residents and is unique in having the largest towns of any UK National Park – Lewes, Petersfield, Midhurst and Petworth. These distinctive towns and the picturesque villages across the National Park provide vital services to surrounding rural areas. The National Park has over 176 parishes<sup>45</sup> and is the most economically active National Park in the UK with over 5,980 businesses employing over 61,000 people.<sup>46</sup> It contains one-third of all businesses in English National Parks, highlighting its uniqueness as a thriving, working landscape. Communities and the rural economy are also two of the special qualities of the National Park:

- An environment shaped by centuries of farming and embracing new enterprise; and
- Distinctive towns and villages, and communities with real pride in their area.

Both the communities of the National Park and the rural economy have been strongly shaped by the landscape. This can be seen in the growth of new land-based industries such as viticulture, with the National Park now home to 49 vineyards and 11 wineries.<sup>47</sup> The landscape has also been shaped by the people who have lived in and cared for it. Key habitats such as chalk grassland and lowland heath developed because of human activity, leading to unique, species-rich habitats. The dew ponds that now provide vital watery oases for wildlife at the tops of the Downs were originally put in place for the

grazing animals whose activity led to the development of species-rich chalk grassland.

The communities of the South Downs live and work in this landscape and have a vital role in creating, shaping and maintaining the special qualities for which the National Park is celebrated. A vibrant rural economy and homes that meet local needs underpin this.

Our people – our communities, farmers, businesses and visitors are our greatest asset – champions to protect and enhance this wonderful landscape now and for future generations. Yet, human pressures on the National Park are very real, with half of the carbon emissions in the National Park coming from visitors and businesses.<sup>48</sup> We, alongside the wider UK National Park family, are committed to regenerative tourism where the aim is not only to minimise the impacts of tourism, but to strive towards tourism making a net positive contribution to our National Parks. As we face the challenges of nature loss and climate change, we must work together to secure a positive future for this special place so that it can be enjoyed and loved by generations to come. Many of the aims in this Partnership Plan simply cannot be achieved without the positive actions of our communities, and our farmers and other rural businesses. Positive action is already happening all over the National Park, but it must be underpinned by a healthy local economy providing jobs for people, affordable homes in our communities, supplying local goods to reduce transport miles, supporting active and sustainable transport, and promoting regenerative tourism.

45 This includes parish councils and parish meetings, and parishes both wholly in and partly in the National Park.

46 [South Downs National Park Economic Profile 2025](#).

47 [South Downs National Park Viticulture Growth Impact Assessment \(2021\)](#).

48 Businesses and visitors contribute 2.1 million tonnes CO<sub>2</sub>e a year to the South Downs National Park Geography, representing 50% of emissions. [A greenhouse gas emissions assessment and target scenario for the South Downs National Park](#).

## The UK National Parks' Commitment to Regenerative Tourism:

- Champion and support tourism development that contributes to the enhancement and regeneration of the places and communities in which it operates.
- Support tourism activity that helps reduce carbon emissions and increases nature recovery, while ensuring National Parks are relevant to everyone's needs.

While destination management is not led by the National Park Authority or any one body across the National Park, working together we can support a welcoming, thriving, nature-rich and climate positive National Park that works for all. This work will be underpinned by the evidence from the 2025 South Down Visitor Accommodation Review and Regenerative Tourism Policy SDE7 in the draft South Downs Local Plan 2024-2042.



## OBJECTIVE 7.1: To support the growth of a greener economy across the National Park while providing outstanding visitor experiences that benefit our communities and landscape.

The landscape and communities of the National Park are connected. They are the basis for the unique visitor experience that people have when they visit the South Downs, whether it be visiting one of our market towns and villages, stepping back in time exploring an Iron Age hillfort or tasting award-winning sparkling wine.

The National Park is a constantly evolving place and the wider world is changing rapidly and facing a time of great economic uncertainty which is being felt by communities and businesses in the National Park. However, positive areas of activity align well with the National Park purposes. The UK economy grew just 0.9 per cent in 2024, while the green economy grew 10 per cent in the same period.<sup>49</sup> In the National Park, a greener economy is key to ensuring a sustainable future for this landscape, its businesses and its communities, while welcoming all those who visit here with an outstanding visitor experience.

### What do we mean by a “green economy”?

The green economy sectors of the National Park are low-carbon infrastructure, sustainable land management, nature recovery, renewable energy, local food systems, eco-tourism and environmental consultancy.



© SDNPA/Rebecca Saunders

It is estimated that continued nature degradation, exacerbated by climate change could lead to a 4.7 per cent reduction in the UK GDP by 2030.<sup>50</sup> A greener economy supports vibrant local communities through services, employment and amenities. Businesses that adapt and that actively lean into green, join a booming sub-sector, that also gets them future-ready for the UK’s transition to a net zero economy. Farmers and other land-based businesses can run profitable businesses producing food and drink alongside supporting climate action and nature recovery.

The growth and development of supportive sustainable business networks in and around the National Park, help it to become a green economic hub through peer support, community and shared learning.’ The shared goal is to help businesses to connect with each other, and to share and develop skills, learning and resources, and to continue to work together to be important custodians of this protected landscape.<sup>51</sup>

50 GFI (2024) [Assessing the Materiality of Nature-Related Financial Risks for the UK.](#)

51 Our South Downs.

The visitor economy contributes £553 million to the local economy, providing employment and inspirational experiences with the National Park. However, the effects of tourism are being felt disproportionately across the National Park, with nature and communities in some hot spots being negatively impacted by too many visitors. Too many visitors in one place also impacts negatively on the experiences of those visitors. Experiencing the lesser-known gems of the National Park and discovering it in new ways, whether that be experiencing our dark night skies or a tranquil walk on less well trodden paths will benefit both visitors and the National Park and will disperse the benefits across the National Park.

Many tourists and more local visitors come to the National Park not only to experience its beauty, but for an opportunity for their visit to contribute positively to our climate action and nature recovery. The focus must be to get the balance between enjoyment and care right.

Working in partnership we will explore ways for visitors and tourism to contribute positively to nature, climate and people and to be supported in making positive visiting choices.



© SDNPA

### TARGETS FOR OBJECTIVE 7.1:

- **Target 7.1a:** Support Local Visitor Economy Partnerships (LVEPs) and other equivalent bodies to achieve Tourism GVA growth by increasing Tourism £GVA within the SDNP by 25% by 2030 from 2024 baseline.
- **Target 7.1b:** Visitor experience: 99% of visitors to rate their enjoyment of the National Park as “high” or “very high”.
- **Target 7.1c:** By 2031, achieve a 43% reduction in tourism-related carbon emissions, lowering the total from 747,000 tonnes CO<sub>2</sub>e to 428,542 tonnes CO<sub>2</sub>e.

52 Gross Value Added (GVA) is the total value added by tourism to the economy in pounds by goods or services.

## OBJECTIVE 7.2: To support the needs of local communities through affordable, accessible and low-carbon housing.

Housing costs in the south east are the most expensive in the UK<sup>53</sup> and properties within the National Park are more expensive than similar properties outside. In addition, one-third of households in the National Park have an annual income lower than £30,000. Access to affordable homes is limited, meaning that many residents may have to travel further for suitable housing and employment. This is a real barrier to maintaining thriving communities where people who work within the National Park can live here, especially young people and families. The demand from affluent urban households seeking a move to the countryside, coupled with limited land availability, exacerbates the issue.

Additional challenges include maintaining local facilities and services such as shops, pubs and primary schools, and addressing the impacts of an ageing population on health and social care facilities.

The lack of affordable housing significantly affects those with lower incomes, often forcing them to relocate and leave behind their support systems and employment opportunities. This outflow of families can disrupt village communities, reducing access to local services and impacting businesses that rely on a steady network of employees and customers.<sup>54</sup>



Affordability is also a key issue in moving towards low-carbon homes. Low-carbon homes are not only better for the planet, they can also be cheaper to run, but retrofitting can be expensive and many properties in the National Park are dependent on oil because of their rural location. More people travelling into the National Park for work also increases the amount of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and air quality and impacts our goal to be net zero by 2040.

### What is an “affordable” home?

- An affordable home is housing provided to eligible households whose needs are not met by the market. It includes houses for sale and for rental.
- The Government defines affordable housing for sale as a minimum 30 per cent below market rates, while affordable rent is defined as rent that is no more than 80 per cent of local market rent.<sup>55</sup>

53 The average house price is 12.9 times average earnings (HEDNA 2023).

54 SDNPA – [State of the Park Report 2024](#).

55 [The South Downs National Park Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document \(SPD\)](#).

Since the adoption of the South Downs Local Plan,<sup>56</sup> the proportion of planning permissions for affordable homes has been increasing, however, there are delivery challenges specifically for ‘Registered Providers’ who are responsible for the ongoing management of affordable homes. These challenges are faced across the country but are particularly acute in rural areas where sites for affordable homes are smaller and less viable for Registered Providers.<sup>57</sup>

The South Downs National Park Authority is committed to supporting the delivery of affordable homes through our planning policies and collaboration with Registered Providers, ensuring such homes are included in market-led development (known as S106 sites). We also recognise the vital role of rural exception sites in increasing affordable housing for local people in the countryside. To expand the potential of these sites in fostering resilient communities, we will work with Rural Housing Enablers and Parish Councils with identified housing needs, to locate and assess suitable land, and offer appropriate incentives to landowners to bring forward sites for much-needed affordable housing. Additionally, we provide grants to those building affordable homes on rural exception sites or through non-profit making organisations such as Community Land Trusts.

Accessible homes are vital to ensuring that the National Park is for everyone. Over 26 per cent of the residents on the National Park are over 65, more than the region and country. This percentage is expected to increase significantly which means more residents living with age-related health issues such as mobility problems.<sup>58</sup>

The provision of affordable, accessible and low-carbon housing to meet local needs is crucial to ensuring the sustainability and vitality of communities within the National Park, to sustain future generations and communities, and to support rural enterprise by providing homes for local workers.

### TARGETS FOR OBJECTIVE 7.2:

- **Target 7.2a:** 300 affordable dwellings to be completed by 2031 (60 per year).
- **Target 7.2b:** Extant permission for 500 affordable dwellings granted by 2031 (100 per year).
- **Target 7.3c:** Extant permission for 1,000 accessible and adaptable homes to be granted by 2031.\*

\*All housing targets must be in alignment with allocations in the South Downs Local Plan, which sets housing numbers.

56 SDNP Local Plan.

57 SDNPA – State of the Park Report 2024.

58 HEDNA 2023.

# HOW WE WILL DELIVER

## Principles for Delivery

The following principles should guide anyone hoping to deliver aspects of the South Downs National Park Partnership Management Plan (2026-31). They include principles that cover our land use planning functions as well as broader principles for delivery:

### Nature & Climate

**AIM 1: The South Downs National Park is a nature-rich, resilient working landscape where wildlife flourishes.**

- **PLANNING PRINCIPLE 1:** We will support development that is landscape-led, follows regenerative development and design principles and has an overall positive impact on natural beauty, landscape and townscape character, natural ecosystems and biodiversity.
- **PLANNING PRINCIPLE 2:** We will support development proposals that protect and take opportunities to enhance designated sites, protect ancient woodland and ancient and veteran trees, support protected species, follow the mitigation hierarchy and take opportunities to deliver bigger, better and more joined up nature.
- **PLANNING PRINCIPLE 3:** In implementing biodiversity net gain, we will seek to ensure that enhancements to biodiversity are appropriate to their landscape, cultural and ecological context, and that any off-setting

of negative impacts takes place within the National Park to ensure that it meets the Purpose 1 requirement to conserve and enhance the wildlife.

- **GENERAL PRINCIPLE 1:** We will prioritise nature recovery that achieves multiple benefits and favour natural functions. We will create bigger, better managed and more connected areas of habitat in and around the National Park.
- **GENERAL PRINCIPLE 2:** We will support farm businesses to access and maintain agri-environment schemes that deliver ecosystem services on the ground, encouraging those that will support regenerative farming, and to access nature-based solutions schemes to deliver nature recovery and climate mitigation.

**AIM 2: The South Downs National Park is on track to become net zero by 2040 by mitigating and adapting to the impacts of climate change.**

- **PLANNING PRINCIPLE 4:** We will support proposals for small-scale renewable energy schemes that are appropriately located and designed, especially where such proposals are community-led and serve communities and businesses within the National Park.
- **PLANNING PRINCIPLE 5:** We will support new development, and the retrofitting of existing development, that achieves net zero operational carbon, minimises embodied whole life carbon, utilises sustainable materials that support the circular economy, and is resilient to the impacts of climate change.
- **GENERAL PRINCIPLE 3:** We will enhance the landscape, connect habitats, store carbon and improve our water environment by getting the right habitat in the right place with the right management.

- **GENERAL PRINCIPLE 4:** We will support activities that give the public a chance to learn more about farming and the important benefits it provides – high-quality food, recreation, wellbeing, nature conservation, the historic environment, landscape and a thriving rural economy.

### **AIM 3: Clean, abundant water supports nature and communities in the South Downs National Park and beyond.**

- **PLANNING PRINCIPLE 6:** We will support a catchment-based approach to water and wastewater management that protects and enhances surface and groundwater quality, restores natural functions and processes, uses nature-based solutions to manage flood risk and improve water supply, and enhances public access to blue infrastructure.
- **PLANNING PRINCIPLE 7:** We will support water efficiency measures and more sustainable patterns of water use and new water infrastructure to protect our water supply, aquifers, rivers and the habitats and species that depend on them.
- **GENERAL PRINCIPLE 5:** We will protect the qualities and character of the Heritage Coast.
- **GENERAL PRINCIPLE 6:** We will raise awareness of the importance of chalk streams and rivers and support their restoration and rehabilitation.

## **People & Place**

### **AIM 4: Young people will have opportunities to access training and skills to enable them to take action to care for and enhance the South Downs National Park.**

- **PLANNING PRINCIPLE 8:** We will support the provision of necessary facilities and infrastructure that enable the delivery of training and education, especially for young people.

### **AIM 5: A valued South Downs National Park is welcoming and accessible to all.**

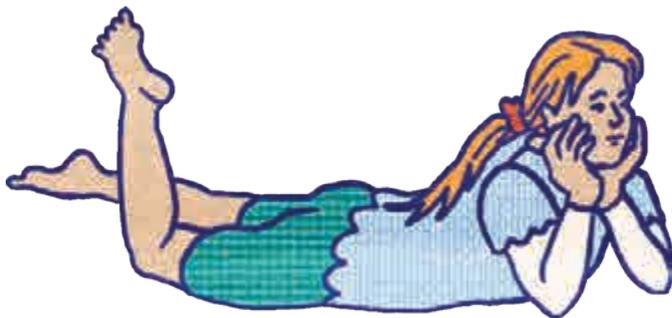
- **PLANNING PRINCIPLE 9:** We will support development that improves the accessibility of the National Park, reduces car travel and facilitates sustainable modes of transport including active travel through better and new public rights of way and access land, safe and attractive pedestrian, equestrian and cycle routes and improved public transport.
- **PLANNING PRINCIPLE 10:** We will protect and enhance the tranquility and dark skies of the National Park by supporting development that avoids unnecessary light pollution and utilises good design to mitigate the impact of any lighting and glazing, conserves relative tranquility and safeguards key views.
- **GENERAL PRINCIPLE 7:** We will promote and encourage the responsible use of the National Park to enhance the health and wellbeing of residents and visitors.

### **AIM 6: Cultural Heritage is conserved, understood, valued, created and passed on for future generations.**

- **PLANNING PRINCIPLE 11:** We will support development that recognises the significance of the cultural heritage of the National Park, conserves and enhances heritage assets, encourages their optimum viable use and improves their ongoing management, especially where they are 'at risk'.
- **GENERAL PRINCIPLE 8:** We will support the conservation and enhancement of the historic and cultural environment of the National Park and its adaptation to climate change through best practice guidance, promoting an uptake in green skills and traditional heritage crafts, and the use of suitable sustainable materials.

**AIM 7: A thriving rural economy and local communities sit at the heart of South Downs National Park.**

- **PLANNING PRINCIPLE 12:** We will support green economic growth that enables regenerative land management, particularly farming and forestry, provides local employment, and supports the production and sale of sustainable food, drink and other products of the National Park.
- **PLANNING PRINCIPLE 13:** We will support development that provides visitor experiences and access that benefit our communities inside and outside the National Park, and enhances the landscape, encourages the use of the National Park as a place for healthy outdoor activity and relaxation and supports a regenerative visitor economy.
- **PLANNING PRINCIPLE 14:** We will support development that enhances the role of towns and villages as social and economic hubs, and improves access to essential community services, infrastructure, including digital and EV infrastructure, and facilities, especially where this is community-led.
- **PLANNING PRINCIPLE 15:** We will support development that provides genuinely affordable housing, particularly social rented housing, that meets the needs of local communities in perpetuity and explore innovative ways of increasing delivery including through community-led development, exception sites and Whole Estate Plans.
- **PLANNING PRINCIPLE 16:** We will support new homes that increase the stock of smaller dwellings, support essential local workers, improve people's health and opportunities, are accessible and adaptable, and meet the diverse needs of our communities throughout all life stages.



# CONCLUSION

**This Plan is ambitious – the National Park needs, and deserves, nothing less.**

The South Downs National Park is a unique, living, changing landscape that means so much to so many people. We need to act now, together, with each of us playing our part. The Authority cannot do it alone.

Together we can secure a positive future for this amazing landscape. Together we can deliver for nature, climate, people and place.









# SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK

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